

GENDER ORDERS IN THE INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS: FROM OUTSIDE IN AND FROM INSIDE OUT

Irena Dychawy Rosner

Malmö University, Sweden

Abstract

The process of internationalization and awareness of the *other* are procedures of presently existing strategies in higher education. Currently, as a part of transcultural education, a growing amount of alternative cross-border educational programs are offered. Critics have suggested that practices focus less on contemporary gender issues in international educations than on issues of language and culture. Globally, employees in health and social care professions are predominantly female, which thus attracts reflective learning on issues connected to gender. This article illuminates an example where Swedish and Danish nursing students participating in an exchange program in Öresund Region have shown gender responsiveness and preconceptions during their clinical practice abroad. Further, this article proposes some ways forward to a more pedagogical approach to increase vocational awareness of gender issues.

KEY WORDS: internationalization at home, cross-border collaboration, employment, gender issues, professionalisation.

Anotacija

Internacionalizacija ir *kito* pažinimas šiuo metu dažnai taikomos aukštojo mokslo strategijos. Siūlomų alternatyvių tarptautinių studijų programų, kaip transkultūrinio švietimo dalies, skaičius nuolat auga. Tačiau kritikai pastebi, kad ši praktika labiau orientuota į kalbos ir kultūros sritis, o ne į šiuolaikinius lyties klausimus. Globaliame kontekste sveikatos ir socialinės rūpybos profesijose dominuoja moterys, o tai savo ruožtu skatina domėtis su lytimi susijusiais aspektais. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiamas pavyzdys, kaip danų ir švedų slaugos studijų studentai, dalyvaujantys mainų programoje Oresundo regione, parodė dėmesį lyties klausimams per praktiką užsienyje. Straipsnyje siūloma naujų būdų, kaip ugdyti lytinį sąmoningumą profesinėje veikloje.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: internacionalizacija namie, tarpvalstybinis bendradarbiavimas, įdarbinimas, lyties klausimai, profesionalizacija.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/tbb.v69i1.1057>

Introduction

The global economic turbulence has rendered an uncertain vision of the future. This is why the supply of highly skilled and qualified people in the Öresund Region, as well as in other regions, is seen as a very important investment. The number of people with a higher education in Skåne, the south of Sweden, places the region in fourth place nationally, and a more in depth sector analysis shows that 16 percent of the population are employed in the health care and nursing care sector and/or social services. Over the past few years, there has been an ever in-

creasing integration process between the Swedish region of Skåne and the Danish region of Sjaelland not least due to the 20 000 people that commute daily to an education program or work place in either Sweden or Denmark. Thus, higher education face great challenges due to increasing cross-border collaboration and increased demands for better matching to the ever shifting requirements and needs of the employment work force. At the same time they have to accommodate to the ever-growing globalization and internationalization of society.

Contemporary patterns of internationalization in higher education are dynamic, diverse and include both educational exchange as well as inter-regional collaboration between universities and their international partnerships (National Agency for Higher Education, 2005). Despite the stipulation to incorporate internationalization through students' and staff's exchange, its broadness is one of its strengths but it may also pose a challenge when new subjects evolve, as for instance issues related to gender theory and as everyday experience of gender in life. Transcultural concepts are also increasingly being incorporated into educational curricula (Like, 2011). However, theories of gender studies and research, for example, have not been developed in the closed realm of academia but rather in a close interplay with the society in which they exist (Silander, Haake and Lindberg, 2013; Springer, Hankivsky and Bates, 2012).

A prerequisite for the gender topic has been a continuing dialogue with social movements as well as the aspiration to transcend existing boundaries. This corresponds with the assumption that the concept of internationalization provides a perspective that brings into line a number of topics, bringing personal and institutional aspects of social relationships together. It has been acknowledged that gender may be an important determinant of health and social behaviours as well as as presenting different opportunities for social positioning and respect (Bowleg, 2012). Nevertheless, the gender implications in international education have been little explored. This paper pays attention to urgent disclosures on gender orders in an educational internationalization process. The overall argument and ideas being presented have evolved through the practical management of a regional cross-border development project as well as from dynamic and enriching discussions with its participants – students, colleagues and research partners at both Malmö University College and Metropolitan University College in Copenhagen.

1. The Growth of Gender theory subjects

The gender concept was introduced to replace the thought and reasoning that in the 60's was referred to as gender role and gender-power order. This development

should, however, not be conceived as being homogenous. Some basic research continues to centre on empirical differences between women and men as much as conceptual research of a high level of abstraction does. In the beginning of the 21st century, social scientific notions such as intersectionality were introduced. The idea was that the intersection points were the very starting-points of the forming of people's experiences, identities and opportunities as well as in the variations of existing power relations, transcultural concepts and social order (Carastathis, 2013). Parallel to this, social constructivism arrived and was directed at the objective legacy of knowledge and ideology of natural science that was prevailing at the time (Ken, 2007).

A prerequisite for the gender topic has been a continuing dialogue with social movements and the aspiration to transcend existing boundaries. In today's individualised structures, gender research, in general, is perceived more as an ideology rather than fields of knowledge (Diekman and Schneider, 2010). Meaning, significance and value have been replaced on behalf of the tendency to highly emphasize on measurable results, *e.g.* wage differences between the sexes, which is seen in higher education where the knowledge production may be political and thus having difficulties living up to those ideals of Humboldt.

2. Internationalization may naturalize knowledge acquisition on existing gender orders

We are living our lives in such a palpably changing environment that we no longer are able to separate the notion of culture from the notions of identity and sociality in our world of ideas. International exchanges naturalize knowledge acquisition in the same way. To acknowledge – not only a specific subject area – but to also appreciate gender theory subjects in the internationalization process of education may contribute to a change by proving the value of having structures that not necessarily are constraining. The value of internationalization revolves around a knowledge yield that is innovative rather than preserving of the present state, *i.e.* through interaction, meetings and dialogues with societies, networks and their existing social movements. The understanding of internationalization as a matter of gender related competence is not, however, a part of a shared curriculum at the present. Internationalization is to a certain extend reduced to personal intercultural knowledge and ideology of dominant cultural elements (Svensson and Wihlborg, 2010). In general, there is also a great variation in how it is implemented and what is claimed to be important for the students or the university (National Agency for Higher Education, 2005).

However, by being a guest in other societies, cultures, establishments and departments, our focus shifts from *what* something *is* to *how* it *appears to be*. Thus, the comprehension of the notion of gender can be developed from being a question of *what* gender differences *are* to becoming a question of *how it appears to be* in certain sets of circumstances and living conditions as well as how its formation appears through interaction with the surrounding society, its structures and the intersectorial diversity. Having to confront structures, networks and situations that are unfamiliar to us, may make sets of standards visible. It may also present an objective perspective to one's own professional position, how it has impact on others, as well as it creates a base for more tolerance capacity (Kuhlmann, 2013). Reduced intersectionality is liable to creating closed identities and reproducing different categories instead of venturing to make itself the target for criticism.

3. An example from Öresund Region

The Öresund project was primarily concerned with enhancing integration and employment in labour market. A major objective of the program was to provide students with employment opportunities – as qualified professionals – in the Öresund Regional health care systems, and ultimately it would create a more mobile workforce that is capable of meeting health care needs across the borders. To optimise the learning experience, teachers from Malmö University College and Metropolitan University College offer in collaboration a course module of a total of 15 ECTS, which includes both theoretical and associated practice learning hours (Dychawy Rosner, 2015). In the context of an ongoing international exchange between Swedish and Danish nursing students, 71 students were asked about gender aspects related to nurses' work tasks. The lectures focused on what constitutes gender qualities, and the students were invited to present their own definitions of gender orders and vocational situations that they perceive as mirroring their experiences and thoughts about gender issues. Thus, the context was not claimed to be relevant, but the particularities of the context came to be connected with a wider discussion of power relations, how gendered hierarchies play out within the health care organisations and how they are affected by the broader professional context in which they are situated.

Purportedly, the students perceived a difference in how the profession itself has developed in the two countries, and thus raising awareness of various inconsistencies in work standards between facilities and their varying emphasis on service delivery. The students took into account basic nursing care, which concerns nursing interventions regardless of specific diagnoses or forms of treatment. They

also included the nurse –patient communication as an integral part of daily nursing practice. The professional role of a Danish nurse was perceived by students to be more feminine, whereas the Swedish nurse was believed to be more masculine. The latter was also interpreted to hold higher status in the health care system. Female gender processes were those assigned to having focus on immediate patient care, therapeutic meetings, and emotional support to manage current conditions, situations and caring. Danish nurses were reported to be more involved in the patient's psychosocial dimensions as front-line nursing staff acting and supporting the individual patient in a patient-centred manner. They were described as putting focus on listening to and communicating with the patients about how various symptoms affect the patients, for example, *i.e.* giving advice and thus cultivating and maintaining good communication skills. Those gender processes being predominantly labelled as male were tasks and areas that involved strictly medical and clinical aspects of the nursing role and whose focus was on technology and medical documentation. Swedish nurses were perceived as more skilled in administering injections as well as exerting a more authoritarian leadership and powerful manager role in the care chain. They were recognized as having more legitimacy than their Danish colleagues, and were believed to work more independently and irrespective of the physicians' decisions and delegations.

These differences were equally shared beliefs of both male and female nursing students. The construct of caring is multi-faceted and subjected to a variety of theoretical frameworks (Bell, Campbell and Goldberg, 2015). Hence, the students did believe that the vocational gender structures of Sweden and Denmark were different. Nursing activities were linked with gendered attributes such as feminine, associated with caring and masculine associated with authority. Traditional views on what is assigned as male versus female were raised and discussed in the classroom as a result of experiences acquired from the actual international exchange. Judging by the students' and teachers' evaluations as well as by circumstantial evidence, it appears that the opportunity to mutually acknowledge and discuss vocational experiences provide students with an inspirational understanding of gender orders of others as well as their own. Thus, according to Raven (2000), to respect different cultural gender orders in this way has been recognised to raise competence and to also critically reflect on practitioner skills. However, to acquire awareness of various gender issues is essentially a lifelong process as each person is unique and influenced by his or her social spheres in multifarious ways. Subsequently, this highlights the need for health care education to include gender issues in the curriculum. Acknowledging the problematic nature of gender orders in professional image may prevent gender-bound negative and demanding stereotypes.

In this process of internationalization, gender orders were mirrored and links between personal life and vocational practice were identified revealing that gender orders clearly remains relevant to health and social care communities of practice. As well as creating connections and networks abroad, gender as a social dimension of the biological category has great significance in how we think and teach, and how research and practical work is carried out. At the same time, educational environments are potentially important sites for the development of theoretical knowledge and vocational skills alike (Dychawy Rosner, 2013). The internationalization in classroom work is thus framed by socio-cultural contexts rather than pedagogical theories and located within a social-constructivist perspective (Carastaitis, 2013). Thus, the practical components of health care education have primarily a socialising influence on the development of the students' professional values and beliefs.

Allowing reflective response when educating health care professions may render recognition of and increased gender equality. When integrated with socially constructed awareness, this knowledge may facilitate students' capacity to explore diversities, and to the realization that contexts are not static, but fluid and shifting. Being given the opportunity to incorporate a critical and reflective lens, such as in this case, offered the students multiple opportunities to not only engage and practice but to reflect as well about a variety of conceptions when exploring the resonance of actions, reactions and interactions.

4. Ways for further elaboration

In this article, the experiences of students' impression of gender orders during their international exchange mobility over the dividing sound of the regions of Skåne and Sjaelland, Öresund Region have been reported. It is argued that there is an additional need to consider in what way the students' impression of gender orders have some substance in the socialization process of the work place and ones professional role. The meaning of constructing professional representation is understood through self-interpretation by the construction of connections between the self and the world.

It is not possible to grasp a full understanding of how representations are made in the modern time and how this process impacts on current conceptualisations such as gender and professionalization. This, however, does not mean that we cannot reconceptualise it in the way of socio-developmental interactions. The auto-genetic history of creating our knowledge was proposed and established, among others, by the genetic psychology of Piaget (1995), sociocultural perspective of

Vygotsky (1978), transitional objects as outlined in the theory of Winnicott (1971) and through dialectical relationship between experience and conceptualisation developed by Kolb (1984). In this sense, the external language of students' reflections is about seeing the object of gender in a particular way or situation, e.g. conceptions of masculinity and femininity, activity systems in communities of practice, internationalization abroad and at home along with its learning environments or teaching, i.e. learning interactions. To elaborate on Argyris and Schön's (1974) notion of reflecting practitioners offers a useful framework for the issues being raised when examining the role of professional development when experiencing vocationally exchangeable social spheres. Consequently, reflection and ongoing critical discussion may be the most useful ways to conceive teaching and learning process that are connected to particular situations (Raven, 2000). In relation to the personal theories of an individual being used and the discrepancy between theory in action and espoused theory (Argyris and Schön, 1974), it is argued here that it is a requirement to also consider the way through which the incorporation of the professional self is developed as well as the transition from individual to collective ways of creating knowledge and to avoid reproducing fixed patterns.

In conclusion, the concept of internationalization and gender studies are both new fields of knowledge, which challenge traditional scholarly perspectives. Knowledge development cannot thrive in static conditions but is dependent on the point of intersection between various social and cultural contexts and sets of circumstances. Thus, it is feasible to adopt a perspective for course of action that allows these fields of knowledge to have stimulating effects on one another by discovering and identifying points of intersection between varying internationalization and gender orders.

Received 2015 01 04

Approved for publishing 2015 03 17

References

- Argyris, C., Schön, D. (1974). *Theory in practice. Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bell, E., Campbell, S., Goldberg, L., Lynette, R. (2015). Nursing identity and patient-centredness in scholarly health services: a research computational text analysis of PubMed abstracts 1986-2013. *BMC Health Services Research*, Vol. 15 (1): 181–207.
- Bowleg, L. (2012). The problem with the phrase Women and Minorities: intersectionality an important theoretical framework for public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 102: 1267–1273.
- Carastathis, A. (2013). Basements and intersections. *Hypatia*, Vol. 28 (4): 698–715.
- Diekman, A. B., Schneider, M. C. (2010). A social role theory perspective on gender gaps in political attitudes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Vol. 34: 486–497.

- Dychawy Rosner, I. (2013). Social responsibility: Internationalisation of healthcare over a bridge. *European Association for International Education*, 21 August. Curriculum & Teaching, Mobility. Website: <http://www.eaie.org/blog/social-responsibility-internationalisation-of-healthcare-over-a-bridge/>
- Dychawy Rosner, I. (2015). *Att korsa gränser – framflytande egenskaper i Öresundsprojektet. [Crossing borders – certain points in Öresund project]*. Malmö: FOU rapport, Malmö högskola, Institutionen för socialt arbete.
- Ken, I. (2007). Race-Class-Gender Theory: An image (ry) problem. *Gender Issues*, Vol. 24: 1–20.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: experience as a source of learning and development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., Engelwood Cliffs.
- Kuhlmann, E. (2013). Sociology of professions: Towards national context-sensitive approaches. *South African review of Sociology*, Vol. 44 (2): 7–17.
- Like, R. C. (2011). Educating clinicians about cultural competence and disparities in health and health care. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, Vol. 31 (3): 169–206.
- National Agency for Higher Education. (2005). *The Internationalization of higher education*. Stockholm: National Agency for Higher Education.
- Piaget, J. (1995). *Sociological studies*. London: Routledge.
- Raven, L. (2000). Mutual recognition and the nursing profession. *Global Health Reform*, Vol. 2: 8–9.
- Springer, K. W., Hankivsky, O., Bates, L. M. (2012). Gender and health. Relational, intersectional, and biosocial approaches. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 74: 1661–1666.
- Svensson, L., Wihlborg, M. (2010). Internationalising the content of higher education: the need for a curriculum perspective. *Higher Education*, Vol. 60 (6): 595–613.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of the higher psychological processes*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. London: Tavistock Publications.