

# Boganmeldelse af *Verdensborgeren og den interkulturelle læring. Inspiration og nytænkning til sprogfagene og andre fag*

Karen Risager & Lone K. Svarstad. 2020. Samfundslitteratur. 218 sider.

On page 177 of their splendid new book, Risager and Svarstad say that textbook writers and teachers should think about their identity and how it impacts on the teaching and learning process. This can be extended to the writing of reviews and, in this present case, it certainly should be. Readers should know that I have known and worked with both authors for many years. Readers should also know that there is considerable reference and alignment with my own writings on intercultural competence and foreign language teaching, which makes my opening remark that this is a 'splendid book' less surprising. All that having been said, readers should also know that all my academic training and subsequent activity made me a critical reader, and that that training has not been 'switched off' in my reading of Karen and Lone's book. Finally, readers should note that the book is written for language teachers in Denmark, in Danish, and that I write from another perspective.

*Verdensborgeren og den interkulturelle læring* is a book written for teachers, teacher trainers, textbook writers and similar readers. It is a



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book with a clear message and it is written in a way which helps readers to examine and understand that message. It does so by skilful use of many didactic techniques: questions and tasks for readers, pointers to the key concepts in each chapter, explanations of the structure of the book and of each chapter, presentation of many examples, excellent use of colour in the text – no doubt the publishers should be congratulated on this too – and various other devices.

The message is simply stated in the foreword: “Bogen er et bud på, hvordan man kan gribe interkulturel læring an i et samfundsen-gageret, globalt perspektiv – i alle fag, men specielt i sprogfagene.” There are three key words here: ‘interkulturel læring’, ‘samfundsen-gageret’ and ‘globalt perspektiv’. The word *verdensborger* encompasses these concepts, and applies it to the learner who develops intercultural competence and uses it in their activity in society, understood as a global society. Language teachers and others should educate learners to be *verdensborgere*.

The method of persuading readers of the book to understand, accept and act upon its message is to assume that they have little or no existing knowledge of the necessary theoretical framework, and that theory is important. I think Risager and Svarstad would agree that there is no practice without theory, that all practice is imbued with theory whether practitioners are aware of this or not, and that good practice can only appear when there is good theory. So, there is also practice which incorporates the theory. It comes in the form of examples of teaching and learning, and analyses of them. There are also tasks for readers, which lead them to investigate beyond the book itself – above all by searching publishers’ websites – and summaries of *fagbegreber* through which readers can extend their professional discourse.

Despite the many references to practice, this is then a book on theory, i.e. on the systematic analysis and systematic construction of concepts and models for pedagogical and didactic actions in teaching of all kinds, but particularly in foreign language teaching. This is the significance of the book’s subtitle: *Inspiration og nytænkning til sprogfagene og andre fag*.

The theory is contextualised with explanations of ‘den globale kontekst’ (chapters 3 and 4) and with ‘spørgsmål til læremidler og undervisning’ (chapters 5 to 10). Theory includes a model for planning teaching, an analysis of ‘identity’, of ‘nationalism’ and ‘trans-nationalism’, and of ‘critical media literacy’. Most importantly, in my view, is the assertion that all this must be seen as *dannelse*, as a means of contributing to *dannelse* for learners.

Book reviews usually summarise a book but there is no need for me to do this when interested readers can find a summary on pages 28 and 29 available online ([wildside.ipapercms.dk/SLFonden/SLforlagene/Samfundslitteratur/Titler/gratis-laeseprøve-verdensborgere-og-den-interkulturelle-læring/?page=28](http://wildside.ipapercms.dk/SLFonden/SLforlagene/Samfundslitteratur/Titler/gratis-laeseprøve-verdensborgere-og-den-interkulturelle-læring/?page=28)).

What is more important is an appreciation of the book from a critical reader. I have already praised the way the book is written. I can add my approval of the message it carries, but this is personal and part of the vision of language teaching I share with the authors. Schools are no longer – and should no longer be – the mechanisms societies use to maintain the status quo, to ensure that those in power remain in power and can pass on their social, cultural and economic capital to following generations. Schools are now locations where children and young people become critical thinkers who take action in their world to change and improve the society to which they belong. Karen, Lone and I agree that the society to which children and young people belong is both the national and transnational, and that language teaching has a particular contribution to make to the transnational dimension. We agree, as Karen and Lone say (page 193), that “et vigtigt mål for den interkulturelle læring er dannelse: samfundengagement og orientering mod politisk handlen”. But we also disagree, or at least have different emphases. As they say, they put more emphasis on the global and visual aspects of intercultural teaching and learning. I have joined them in the global, or and as I would say, ‘internationalist’ aspect in more recent writings than they quote. But I have also put more emphasis not only on *engagement* (using the French word) but also on direct action which brings societal change. I would have liked to see more on how language teachers can – perhaps should – encourage learners to break through the walls of the classroom and ‘engage’ with people in their (global) society. This raises however some serious ethical questions for teachers and would need further development in the book. It may well come in the next edition, for by that time teachers may be ready for a more *engagé* attitude to *engagement*.

We also differ on the balance between teaching skills and teaching knowledge. Although skills are certainly discussed as important aspects of language teaching, the emphasis throughout the book is on knowledge of the world and on critical understanding and analysis of the materials through which teachers teach, and learners learn.

In the next edition, too, I expect there will be more on non-European languages, as Danish language teaching evolves. This obviously includes Chinese and would necessitate an analysis not only of Eu-

ropean colonialism – part of the contextualisation provided for (European) language teaching in the book – but also of past and present Chinese colonialism.

Perhaps too there will be more emphasis on ‘power’ and prejudice. All intercultural encounters involve relationships of status and power, as do encounters which are not intercultural. Claire Kramsch has focused on this in her concept of ‘symbolic competence’, the potential of which is still to be fully realized in pedagogical and didactic theory.

By saying that there will be a new edition, I am not implying that this book is in need of immediate improvements, but that it has the potential to become a standard work for teachers, and others.

I would wish, too, for another kind of edition, one which is accessible to teachers in other countries. This is a Danish book about teaching and learning in Denmark, and cannot simply be translated. It is however a book which is an inspiration and a model for authors in other countries to follow. It demonstrates how to present new pedagogical insights and methodological/didactic innovations in a way which is both theoretically well-founded and practically accessible and appealing. It is too good to remain accessible only to those who read Danish and know the Danish education system and its policies. I hope its assured success in Denmark can be extended to other languages and countries in the near future.