



LÆRING OG  
FORANDRINGSPROCESSER



# PBL IN POST-GRADUATE CLASSES WITH DIVERSE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUNDS

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH – PBL GETS GOING!

MIE ENGEN, MIA ARP FALLOV, JULIE BORUP JENSEN, RUNE HAGEL  
SKAARUP JENSEN, OLE RAVN



AALBORG UNIVERSITY  
DENMARK

# Program

11.15-11.35: Presentation/ Mie Engen

11.35-11.50: Workshop/ Ole Ravn & Rune Hagel Skaarup

11.55-12.05: Results and conclusions/ Julie Borup Jensen

12.05-12.15: Questions and comments



# Background and focus

Rising number of students in the classroom:

- Students with **diverse backgrounds and different approaches** to and **preconditions** for academic work and for decoding the culture and language of the academic environment (Jensen 2016).

Challenges:

- How can we (teachers, educational planners) be sure to reach all students?
- Problems with inclusion/exclusion (dropout)

The project explores:

- **Challenges and possibilities** when using PBL as a framework for creating shared interdisciplinary professional identity and skills in post-graduate classes with diverse undergraduate backgrounds



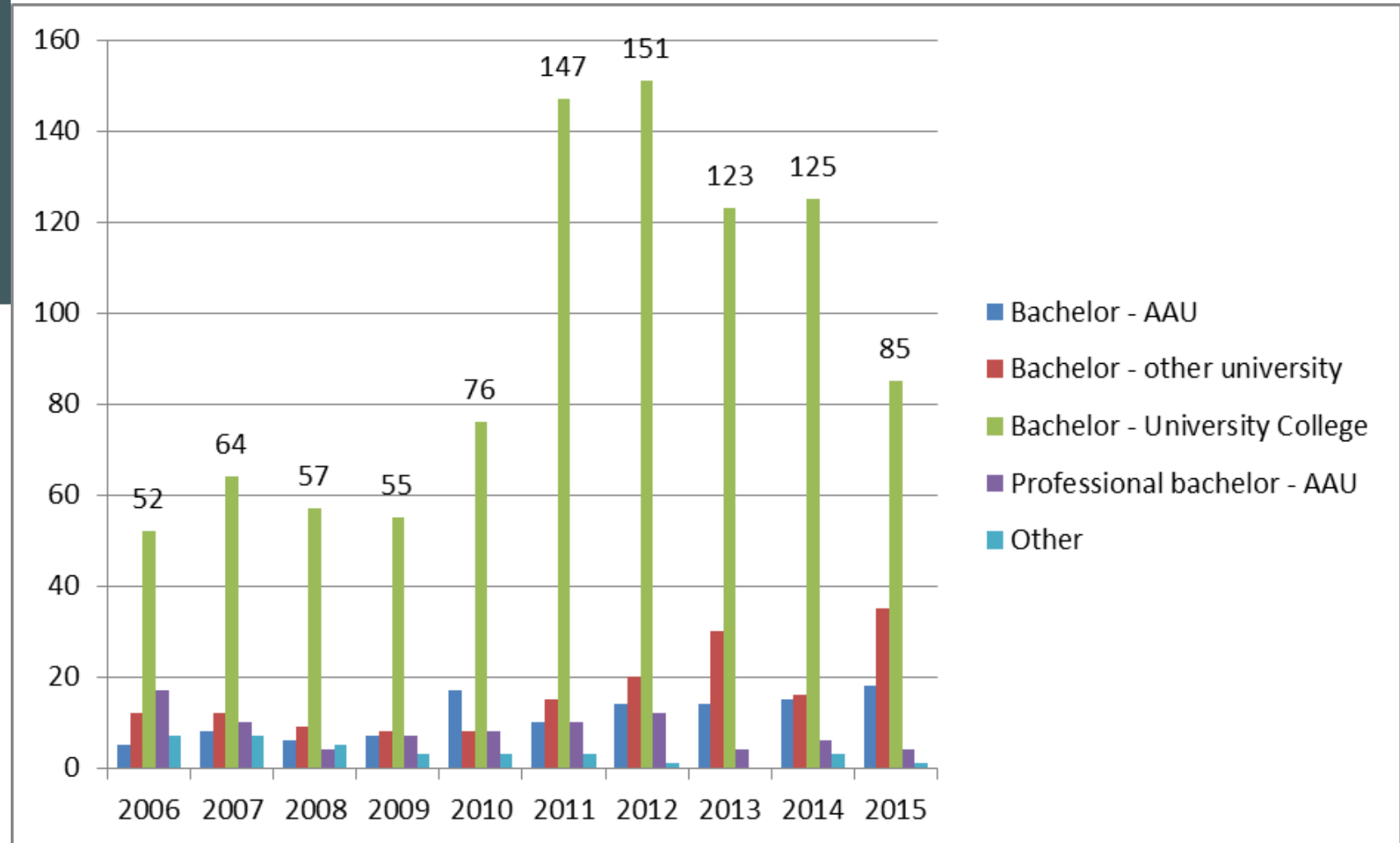
# Questions explored

1. What does student diversity look like?
2. How do the students experience working with PBL?
3. How do the educational planners experience challenges and possibilities in working with PBL and student diversity?
4. The results are summed up in *a didactical model* for educational planners to introduce PBL for the students



Decreasing  
number of  
bachelors from  
UC  
- a more  
diverse group of  
students

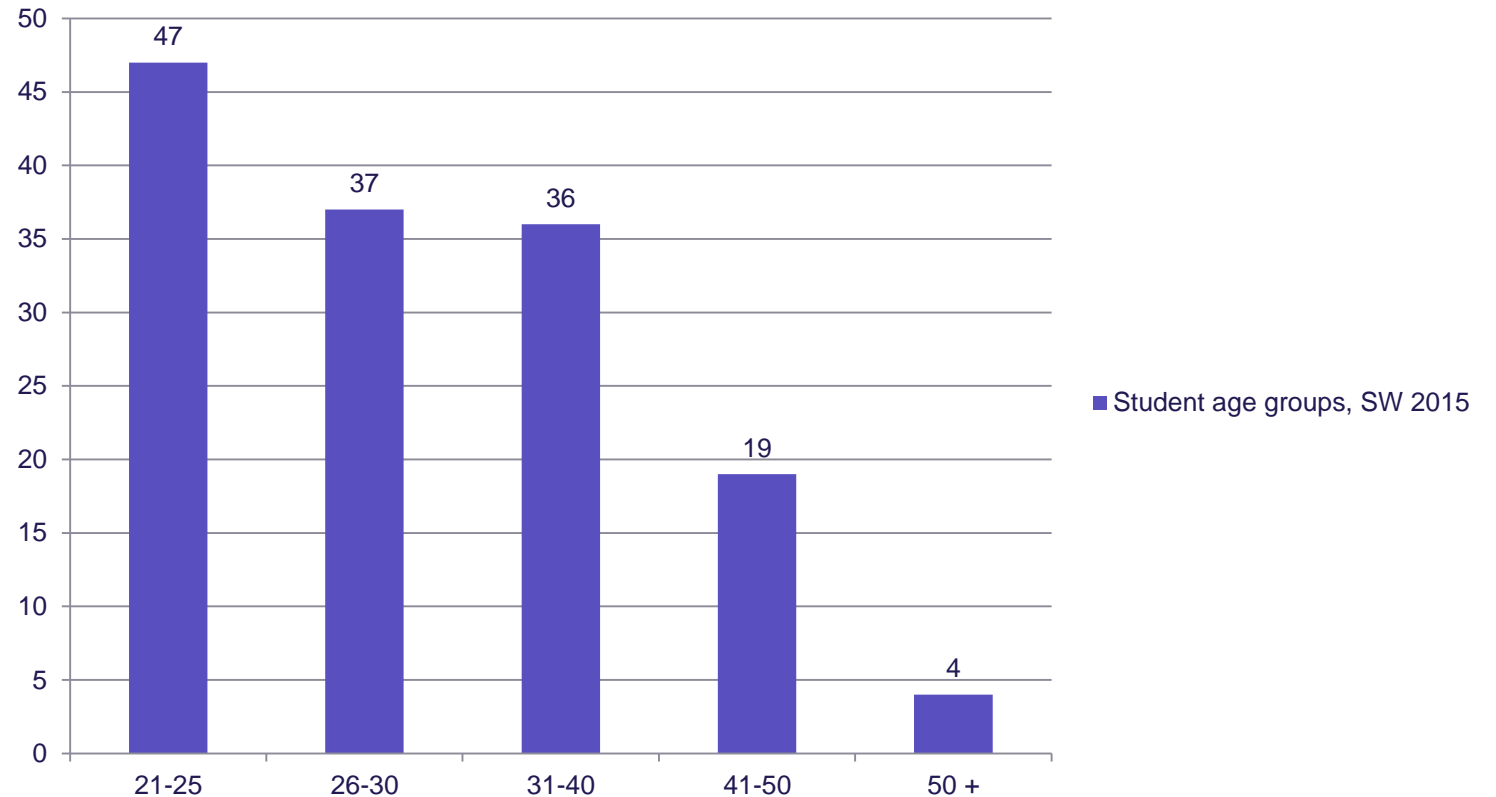
All students enrolled in SW in the years 2006-2015



# Different age groups – students from SW

- 33 % is aged 21-25
- 51 % is aged 26-40
- 13 % is aged 41-50
- 3 % is 50 plus
  
- Average age in 28 years
- Different life experiences, life phases and needs in relation to balancing student life and personal life
  
- 90 % of the students are women

Student age groups, SW 2015



# Diversity in motivation for studying – seen from the educational planners' point of view



# Types of students – seen from the educational planners' point of view

- The anecdotal student
- The compliant student
- The critical thinker
- The entrepreneur
- The social engineer





# The students' experiences working with PBL

- *I think it is really great to have learned to work together in situations with a lot of pressure, where you hope things will turn out well. With something, where you want it to be good, you want it to be your own, but you still have to agree with others (student, LCP)*
- *I don't think, I would be lying if I said that I get 90 % of my learning from group work. I simply don't get enough out of sitting there and listening. I have to work with it and dive into it (student LCP)*
- *I think it is learning that is made concrete because it is contextualised. You have to use theories you have been taught on a concrete case. In this way, you are forced to work in a way where it is not just: 'I remember, I repeat', but 'I use it' (student SW)*



# The students' experiences working with PBL

- *Considering that PBL is such a corner stone and a guiding principle at this university, I think we lacked an introduction to it and some more reading material about PBL (student, SW)*
- *We have very different experiences with PBL. Some students have a bachelor from AAU and have written 6 PBL-projects. Others have never worked this way because they have a professional bachelor's degree (student, LCP)*



# Experiencing diversity

- Differences in academic background
- Differences in academic competencies
- Differences in engagement, participation and work effort
- *We are so different and the 'older ones', who haven't studied for a while are really a barrier in the project work. They often want to write about something 'practical', and in this graduate program we have to be oriented towards theory (student, SW)*



# Diversity as a strength

- *You see the problem in a different way, even though it is the same theory you are using to look at the problem. But I have one way of thinking, one practice and way of working, because I have been in nursing care for many years. And then there might be a social worker, who has an entirely different view. So we challenge each other (student, SW).*



# Workshop questions

## PBL and Diversity

- Discuss your experiences with diversity in your own educational contexts
- What challenges and possibilities does PBL offer in relation to diversity in these contexts?



# Endpoints

- PBL and its potentials as a unifying model relate to:
  - "Real world problem finding" and problem solving
  - Cross-disciplinarity
  - Group work
- Requires:
  - Awareness of different student needs in teaching and supervision



*Analysis results merged into a didactical construction aiming at developing an interdisciplinary professional identity (based on the structure developed by Hiim & Hippe 2010)*

**Evaluation:**

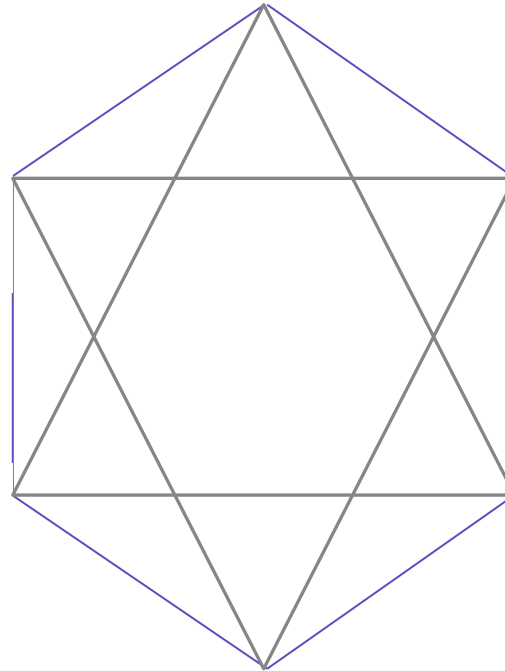
Allocate time for students to present results from project work in class

**Learning process:**

Allocate time in teaching for group work with PBL-tasks and exercises

**Student preconditions:**

Diversity concerning:  
Life-experience  
Professional/educational background  
Pre-knowledge of PBL



**Content:**

Visualisation of teaching as supporting PBL  
Emphasising positive aspects of student diversity in PBL  
Supporting students' reflections on own strengths in cross-disciplinary work/project work

**Conditional factors:**

University setting  
Curriculum and study programme  
Time resources: PBL-introduction and PBL-exercises  
Organisational support for PBL as contributing to student learning in the specific disciplines

**Goal:**

Sense of belonging in the study programme  
Collective professional identity  
PBL-principles

# PBL and the AAU-model

Student diversity awareness in all of the following steps and components:

- 1) Problem: a problem motivates and guides the students' learning process
- 2) Project: the actual learning process, where analysis and work with the problem result in knowledge acquisition academic skills
- 3) Groups: collective working process, characterised by autonomy in relation to problem and project
- 4) A supervisor, who supports both project and group process in the work with the problem
- 5) Courses as a support for project work (AAU, 2016)





# References

- Engen, Mie, Fallov, Mia Arp, Jensen, Rune Hagel Skaarup, Jensen, Julie Borup & Ravn, Ole (2017) *PBL og de sammensatte hold på kandidatuddannelser. "When the going gets tough, PBL gets going!"*. Aalborg Universitet.
- Hiim, H. & Hippe, E. 2006, *Praksisveiledning i lærerutdanningen : en didaktisk veiledningsstrategi*, Gyldendal Akademisk, Oslo
- Jensen, J.B. (2016), *Transgressive, but fun. Music in university learning settings*. Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

