

**“Education, risk and conflict”  
26-28 NOVEMBER 2015  
JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY**

**SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACT**

*Conference Theme:*

Intercultural Communication: Education

*Title of abstract:*

Intercultural Communication in a Higher Education Institution

*Research topic:*

Groups and cultures in higher education institutions.

*Content:*

Challenges in establishing good communication between groups and cultures in a higher education institution.

*Method:*

Research done at the University of Stavanger, interviews and questionnaire.

*Bibliography:*

Barth, Fredrik, ed. (1969). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget.

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Biggs, John & Catherine Tang (2011). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Fourth edition.

Engeström, Yrjö and Terttu Tuomi-Gröhn (ed) (2003). *Between school and work: new perspectives on transfer and boundary-crossing*. Amsterdam: Pergamon.

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton (2013). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity.

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Endorsed by the Ministerial Conference, May 2015.

Star, Susan Leigh and James R. Griesemer (1989). Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907 - 39, in *Social Studies of Science*, Volume 19, 1989.

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*Please write the abstract below:*

This paper rests on the premises that a higher education institution (HEI) has its own social structure with enduring patterns formed by the relationships between individuals and groups (Giddens 2013). For the purpose of this study students may be considered as one social group, academic staff another, administrative staff and academic leaders yet other social groups. Within these groups there will again be subgroups (Becher & Trowler, 2001) but we will reduce this complexity for now. By institution here is meant a particular higher education institution, such as a university.

The paper will discuss how members of groups within higher education institutions (HEI) can utilize different cultures and perspectives on education to develop the quality of the student experience (ESG 2015). The argument is that principles from intercultural communication may be put to use in such environments, and that it may even be necessary to raise the consciousness of these principles as there may be a misleading assumption that all actors within an HEI share the same culture and perspective of their world.

However, this study will not focus on the particular cultures within the various social groups, but instead take Barth's (1969) perspective that the study should focus on what goes on in the border areas between the groups. Here we will introduce the concept boundary object, from Star and Griesemer (1989) to discuss a practical approach to intercultural communication in an HEI. Our suggestion is that the curriculum is a boundary object in this context. Insight from Biggs and Tang (2011) on coherence in curriculum development, and Engeström and Tuomi-Gröhn on transfer and transformation will also be brought into the discussion.

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