

Danish-American Well-Being Seminar 2023

Well-Being and Learning in Higher Education



BLUE BOOK & IDEA BOX



**AALBORG
UNIVERSITY**



**Uddannelses- og
Forskningsstyrelsen**

**INNOVATION
CENTRE
DENMARK**

COLOPHON

BLUE BOOK AND IDEA BOX – DANISH-AMERICAN WELL-BEING SEMINAR 2023

Aalborg University (AAU)

Agency for Higher Education and Science (UFS)

Innovation Centre Denmark, Boston and Silicon Valley (ICDK)

The seminar was part of the concluding activities of the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science's internationally oriented project on how to design a better student life: "Designing a Happier Student Life for Better Learning". The project was completed in collaboration with Innovation Centre Denmark and was based on knowledge and experience from distinguished American universities. Read more about the project here (mainly in Danish):

[Designing a happier student life for better learning.](#)

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PREFACE – WHAT IS BLUE BOOK AND IDEA BOX?

This is the digital footprint from the Danish-American Well-Being Seminar 2023, which was hosted by Aalborg University on October 12th, 2023.

The intention is to make a document for the seminar participants, which can easily be shared with colleagues and collaborators who did not participate and might benefit from the ideas from the seminar. The document is brief and gives a quick overview of the event.

In short – the blue book gives you the seminar and its results at your fingertips!

In particular, the document shares the outcome of group discussions and question sessions (Agora and Talk-Show, see pp. 7-8) in the form of an 'Idea Box', which contains new ideas accumulated during the seminar.

LIST OF CONTENTS

PART 1 – THE BLUE BOOK

1.1 A NEW START – WELL-BEING IN THE CURRICULUM

1.2 SCOPE OF THE SEMINAR

- Time for action

1.3 THE KAT SEMINAR FORMAT

1.4 PROGRAM AND LINKS TO KEY-NOTES AND TALK SHOWS

- Prof. Rick Miller, Coalition for Life Transforming Education
- Prof. Greg Walton, Stanford University
- Dr. Urmila Venkatesh, Life Design Lab, Stanford University

PART 2 – THE IDEA BOX

2.1 THE IDEA BOX

- Ideas – from the Agora-session and the evaluation

PART 3 – PICTURES FROM THE SEMINAR

PART 1 – THE BLUE BOOK

FIGURE 1. TEASER VIDEO FROM DANISH-AMERICAN WELL-BEING SEMINAR



1.1 A NEW START – WELL-BEING IN THE CURRICULUM

The well-being of young people is an area that requires particular attention in a positive light. The aim of this is to inspire higher education to focus on promoting the mental health aspects of learning for all students – not just the students that must receive help due to personal reasons. Higher education naturally and implicitly holds a multitude of opportunities for cultivating and building up e.g. positive emotions, engagement and flow, sense of belonging, meaningful purpose and motivation – and finally – achievement and experience of mastery.

The Well-being Seminar recognized that education is a core task for society. The aim was to explore how educational institutions can help create the best conditions for student well-being so that students can meet educational challenges – which everybody will face at some point – and come to master resilience and find their path to learning.

Time for action!

Well-being is an issue that currently attracts a lot of attention in the media and constitutes a serious problem for society!

Well-being and good mental health are and have always been important. In recent years the COVID-19 pandemic has only stressed this issue – and maybe contributed to the realization that well-being and mental health is not just an individual responsibility. Everybody has a “mental health” and by addressing this collectively it will benefit society on a larger scale.

The seminar addressed promoting student well-being and learning – and how educational institutions and teachers in collaboration with students can help strengthen well-being and use well-being to create better teaching.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE SEMINAR

The seminar took a closer look at the activities of the institutions by focusing on how to support well-being through activities rooted in the curriculum. The seminar was not about unhappiness, but it is clear that positive action around well-being will serve to counteract unhappiness. The seminar provided a setting for knowledge sharing, exchange of

BLUE BOOK AND IDEA BOX – DANISH-AMERICAN WELL-BEING SEMINAR 2023

experience and debate. The purpose was also to create networks across the sector and the institutions that can support the exchange of ideas and experience on the positive angle of better well-being in education.

We intended to tackle the challenges and explore the opportunities by covering the domain with the following themes/topics:

- 1) The institutional approach – role and responsibility of the whole organization
- 2) The transition to – and reception into – student life.
- 3) Merging the science of *well-being* into the core domain of *Learning & Teaching* – an assimilation or adoption into teaching practices

1.3 THE KAT SEMINAR FORMAT

The seminar covered three workshops following the KAT format (Keynote – Agora – Talk Show) as illustrated in Fig. 1. In the Keynote, the speaker presents to the audience in a classic format for 30 minutes. This is followed by an Agora session of 30 minutes with group discussions during which the speaker circulates among the groups, contributes and mingles. The Talk Show concludes the workshop and the speaker is interviewed by a peer from Danish Higher Education, who matches the speaker’s field of expertise.

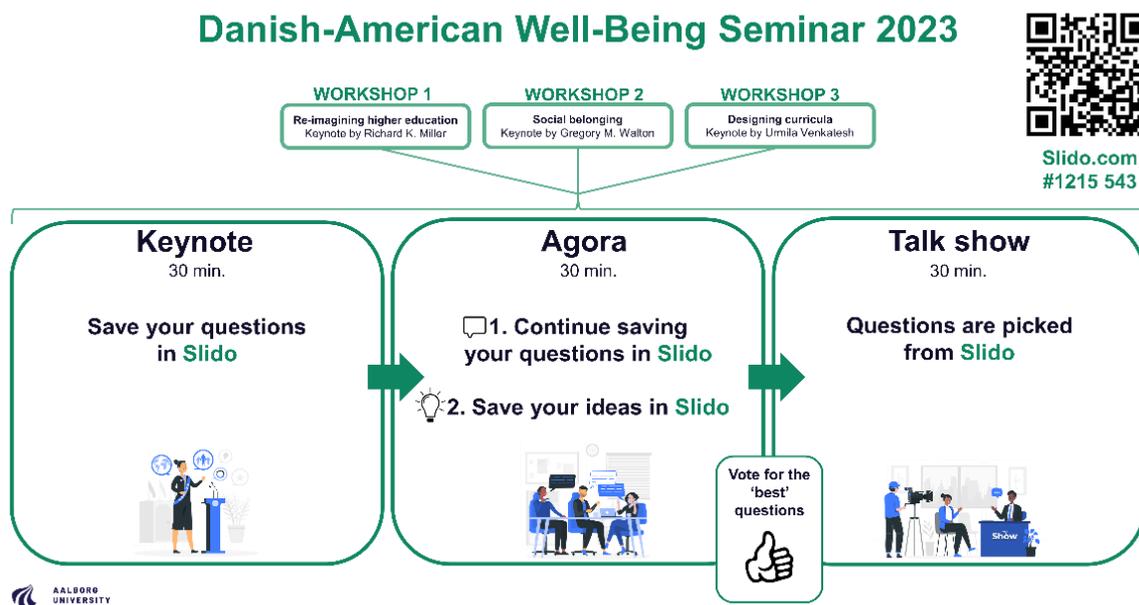


FIGURE 2. INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS ON HOW TO USE SLIDO

The KAT workshop was supported by a digital platform (Slido): During the Keynote, participants were asked to post questions, which could be addressed during the Talk Show. The first part of the Agora was dedicated to elaborating, posting questions and individual voting to rank the questions. The second part of the Agora focused on group discussions on new ideas that participants came up with. The ideas were also uploaded to the digital platform in a separate section. During the Talk Show the interviewer included questions from the Agora. The last part of the Talk Show was dedicated to presenting some of the Agora ideas to the speaker, who could elaborate and comment.

1.4 PROGRAM AND LINKS TO KEY-NOTES AND TALK SHOWS

For future reference and for the opportunity to watch the key notes and talk show sessions please see below:

	<p>RE-IMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION Making higher education Work for Life: The Coalition for Transformational Education</p> <p>Keynote by Richard K. Miller <i>President Emeritus of Olin College of Engineering</i></p>	<p>Link to Keynote: https://youtu.be/Tn8_dmlGfJM</p>
	<p>Interviewed by Rector Per Michael Johansen, AAU</p>	<p>Link to Talk-Show: https://youtu.be/Hn0kbi8PUm4</p>
	<p>SOCIAL BELONGING Questions of Belonging: How they work and How We Can Create Schools in Which Every Student Belongs</p> <p>Keynote by Gregory M. Walton <i>Professor of Psychology and Michael Forman Bass University Fellow in Undergraduate Education, Stanford University</i></p>	<p>Link to Keynote: https://youtu.be/ilGleYc6lNQ</p>
	<p>Interviewed by Prof. Xiangyun Du, AAU</p>	<p>Link to Talk-Show: https://youtu.be/SEKoPGSLrLg</p>
	<p>DESIGNING CURRICULA How Might I Thrive? Designing Curricula and Experiences for Learners' Well-Being</p> <p>Keynote by Urmila Venkatesh <i>Lecturer and Fellow, Life Design Lab, Stanford University</i></p>	<p>Link to Keynote: https://youtu.be/kklGUJXlAnU</p>
	<p>Interviewed by Prof. Euan Lindsay, AAU</p>	<p>Link to Talk-Show: https://youtu.be/DXaM-7wZZUY</p>

PART 2 – THE IDEA BOX

2.1 THE IDEA BOX

Following the seminar, participants were asked to continue the feedback on ideas, which were accumulated in the week following the seminar. All ideas are presented in this document as an Idea Box in the raw unedited form.

- Honour/recognise teaching dedication in the same way as e.g., professorships for research success.
- Acknowledge that one of the most important purposes of universities are to educate young people.
- Just as we have research-based teaching, we could acknowledge competence-based teaching, where teachers are acknowledged for addressing well-being. This requires other approaches and recognition of this.
- Well-being among teachers with a focus on the whole person. This will provide intrinsic motivation for supporting students' well-being.
- Could we change our job descriptions, when hiring new educators? Could we focus on the fact, that the gig also includes the responsibility for well-being?
- Build wellbeing into the fabric of the institution - not just events, training, and words. Make it transformational - everyone should be included - faculty, staff, students.
- Create holistic and transformational education experiences, where with whom and where, as well as what type of problems students engage, can support the attainment of knowledge and skills, like empathy, openness, purpose (even the purpose of the education and profession), etc.
- Improve the conditions for teaching in terms of money/hours. The value of STÅ has decreased so programmes get fewer hours to actually teach the students although programmes are under increased pressure to offer contact hours (but staff get no hours to prepare teaching or supervision).
- What if we stopped having an instrumental approach to education (and well-being)? And instead gave space and time to both students and educators to take this journey of education (and life) together. For example, freely researching across semesters. Rethinking teaching and exams.
- An award to a teacher that changed a student's life. Honouring it, similar to the model at Stanford.
- Introduce morning song sessions.
- Role of education in present day society and what students should also develop: emotional intelligence, development of the self, etc. Diversity and massification of universities also uncover challenges at personal, social/psychological levels that were hidden, non-spoken, and now are more emergent.
- Somehow create a framework to help the student's take responsibility for their own well-being; doing things for themselves that are good (e.g., exercise, gratitude journals)
- Every school from elementary to university should have a well-being institute.
- In working with student groups - how do we create a process where all students are included?
- Cultural programs - where international students feel they belong and can present their culture.
- Do by example: prepare staff for "difficult conversations", or approach well-being, and support agency, identity, and sense of belonging when our students collaborate among them, but also with stakeholders as part of their PBL experience/education.
- See buddy network for supporting the integration of international students at AAU.
- At UCN we have developed a campus-walk for new students. Groups of students get a map with posts around campus, that they must find. At the posts they get a story from campus, an insight on how we teach at UCN (RPL) and a small task about a student competence. To give them a sense of belonging.
- Working with the students' identity and their representation in the physical environment.
- Having a person who everyone knows they can contact if they're experiencing issues. And teachers should also enforce the process of mixing the students so that students don't just seek what they're familiar with.

BLUE BOOK AND IDEA BOX – DANISH-AMERICAN WELL-BEING SEMINAR 2023

- Ensuring that language is not a barrier to e.g., international students (so, Danish speakers should be equipped to engage in English and non-Danish speakers should also be equipped to engage in English. Using English in an academic setting requires a higher level that most realise)
- Community building crossing borders has a purpose in itself. We are all different, but the same.
- The new model from the well-being administration with informal dialogues. It works.
- To include belonging and growth mindset in the curriculum of the professional-pedagogical teaching training.
- Developing student associations based on ethnicity or citizenship.
- Initiation of intercultural programs where international students can present their own culture.
- Stop talking about employability. Start talking about dreams and career planning.

PART 3 – PICTURES FROM THE SEMINAR

FIGURE 3. PICTURES FROM THE SEMINAR

