

Bjarne's Quiet Wisdom

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I was never really sure whether it was English or Danish Bjarne spoke when you knocked on his door and he replied with a prolonged 'o' as in 'Cooooome in!' or 'Kooooom ind!' – they would have sounded more or less the same, and maybe that was the point, since you would not have been visible to Bjarne yet, and so he would not know whether there was a Danish speaker or a non-Danish speaker knocking. What I do know, though, is that I always felt comfortable knocking on Bjarne's door. He would always find time for a conversation, long or short.

I especially took advantage of Bjarne's hospitality in my first year as a Teaching Fellow in Danish at the University of Edinburgh. As the only senior Danish speaker in the section, Bjarne would be my mentor. This was wonderful, because speaking to a fellow Dane so far from home felt a bit like... home. I spent many half hours in the chair opposite Bjarne's desk, asking too many questions, yet always getting sound advice and thoughtful comments in return. However, the most useful and kind feedback I received from Bjarne was when he observed my class as part of my process of becoming a fellow of the HEA. It felt a bit daunting, having to be observed by someone more experienced. We academics can also feel very protective about the space that is our classroom. Nevertheless,

I would argue that observation can be both a useful and a supportive experience for both parties.

In this case, after my observation, Bjarne's feedback was extremely thorough. The feedback included what went well in that particular class, and so, certainly, I could pat myself on the back for a well prepared and executed class. But what really struck me was how Bjarne had paid attention to all the little details in my teaching, the ones that you cannot prepare yourself for or 'wing' in a class: the components that make you a teacher. Bjarne's comments made me feel very supported in my general approach to learning and teaching. They also emphasised that a teacher does not have to be an entertainer, or be extremely extroverted, to be good. You can be quiet, while leading wisely. This very manner is part of Bjarne's legacy, and I am very grateful to have worked with him. I am grateful to him for taking time for our conversations and for his influence on my own academic practice.