Addressing Cultural Diversity in the International Classroom:
A Challenge or an Opportunity?

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Abstract
Composition of classrooms in higher education is evolving as universities become more accessible to students from different social and cultural backgrounds. This change has led to an increase in campus diversity among faculty members as well as students. The diversity among students challenges instructors to examine their previously uniform, teaching practices.

To address this issue, it is necessary to consider the diversity that instructors themselves bring to the international classroom in terms of gender, ethnicity, social class, religious beliefs and other individual differences. Glossing over such differences blinds instructors to the effects of increasing student diversity on the classroom environment (Plank & Rohdieck, 2007).

This presentation highlights three outcomes of an "international classroom" that integrates student and instructor diversity. First of all, by recognizing student diversity, instructors are better able to design culturally sensitive courses and apply the most suitable teaching methods to address a diverse student group, maximizing students' potential. Secondly, identifying diversity stimulates clearer communication between instructor and students' appreciation for the student's individual uniqueness, thus creating a positive learning environment. Finally, the unrealistic and inequitable notion of a culturally "neutral" classroom is dispelled (Timpson, Canetto & Yang, 2003). Instructors' individual identities influence the language we use, the specific issues or points we discuss in the classroom, the ideas and values we share and ultimately our interactions with our students.

1.   Introduction:

The notion of culture embodies a vast and complex school of definitions. Culture can be defined as the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understandings that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group. According to Banks & McGee (1989),

> ".... Culture is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies".

Additionally, the broad definition of the international classroom entails a learning environment in which students from an international background convene to collaborate and share experience and knowledge and at the same time develop skills, which eventually prepare them for the global community of which they will later be a part. In our institute, the international classroom provides for students from a variety of ethnic, cultural and social background, who co-exist in an international environment in an effort to develop global and intercultural competencies, which are pertinent in a global society. Preparing students with intercultural skills is crucial to the current multicultural arena in which we operate. It is therefore necessary for students to develop cross-cultural skills and understanding of critical issues regarding the operation and management of multinational and transnational organisations.

I will address the issue of cultural diversity between instructors and students within the international classroom. The influence of an instructor's character and behaviour on the ultimate performance of a student is not to be underestimated. Furthermore, there are other circumstances that contribute to a student's academic performance. These include personal characteristics, family background and societal experiences. However, research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most. Other research states that, compared with teachers, individual and family characteristics may have four to eight times the impact on students' achievement. Although policy discussions focus on teachers because it is arguably easier for public policy to improve teaching than to change students' personal characteristics or family circumstances, effective teaching has the potential of boosting students' ability to perform.

> "*I prefer the teachers who know and take their responsibilities well. And treat students equally*"[1].

Similarly, one of the more recent trends in higher education is to develop global citizens for global employability and global responsibility (Fielden, 2007) (Corbin, 1998) and therefore such trends are expressed in the internal strategies set out by many institutes of higher education. Accordingly, these institutions are increasingly placing high premiums on intercultural learning, an appreciation for cultural diversity, the development of cross-cultural communication skills and the fostering of a global perspective across all subject areas. In addressing cultural diversity in the

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[1] Interviewee: Chinese student (1)

international classroom, the following areas will be explored: First of all, the idea of the international classroom and its intricacies will be discussed. Secondly, I will examine the influence of international faculties and their effect on the international classroom. The third discussion ensues with an outline of three outcomes of the international classroom. These are:

1. How to recognise student diversity and allow instructors to be better able to design culturally sensitive courses and apply the most appropriate teaching methods when addressing a diverse student group in order to maximise the full potentials of students.
2. How to increase vivid communication channels between instructor and students, and students among themselves by identifying cultural diversity, thus stimulating appreciation of others' uniqueness, and ultimately creating a positive learning environment.
3. How to contend with the misconception that a culturally "neutral" international classroom is viable.

Finally, instructors' individual identities influence the language used, the specific issues or points discussed, the various notions and values shared and ultimately our interactions with our students in the international classroom.

The general purpose of this paper was to examine the issues relating to cultural diversity. As an opportunity, addressing cultural diversity:

- Enriches the educational experience – appreciating beliefs, experiences and perspectives that are dissimilar to our own, in a richly diverse intellectual and social environment.
- Builds strong teams, communities and consequently, the workplace. Education within a diverse setting prepares students to become global citizens in the current complex, pluralistic society. Additionally, it fosters mutual respect and understanding, and helps to construct communities whose members are evaluated by the quality of their character and contributions.
- Encourages personal growth and an enriched society, and questions stereotyped misunderstandings.
- Stimulates critical thinking, and assists students in learning to communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds.

However, there are several disadvantages to the culturally diverse classroom. First of all, instructors' lack of experience in working in this relatively 'emerging' environment. According to Hooks, (1994 p. 37) "it's hard to put yourself in someone else's shoes and think about how his or her experiences may have been very different from yours". In other words it is extremely difficult to be culturally competent in the international classroom, when you do not share the same culture as your students. Secondly, the teaching methods applied in the traditional classroom might not be suitable for the culturally diverse classroom. Jenkins and Bainer (1990) reflect this at the presentation at the Lilly Conference (1990) on 'Chicago Teaching'. The disadvantage of this is that teachers must always be aware of their teaching methods and engage in a reflective process to be sure they are not treating one group of students differently from the other. Ineffective teaching methods are not conducive of

productive learning. Differentiation is also a common cause of concern in the culturally diverse classroom (Jenkins and Bainer, 1990). Different ethnic groups of students generally have different educational and cultural backgrounds and so instructors in the culturally diverse classroom need to devise different assignments that will be appropriate for all students. Finally, in a classroom representing a wide variety of cultures, misunderstandings are bound to eventuate. Misinterpretation of gestures, intonation, silence, social situations, body language and so on, will occur (Jenkins and Bainer, 1990).

2. Literature review:

According to Loomis and Sharpe (1990, p.1),
> "Diversity is a celebration of differences and an appreciation of the bonds that unite people. Experiencing diversity is a common component of a quality educational experience; to achieve excellence it is also imperative to achieve diversity".

Banks (1989) contends that educational institutes should be used to address societal inequalities grounded in ethnicity, social class and history. Campbell (1999) built on earlier ideas of Dewey (e.g., 1996) in particular to argue for the fundamental importance of multicultural education and its emphasis on particular ideas and skills (acceptance, tolerance, critical thinking, and cooperation) for what is necessary for citizenship in a healthy democracy. Nabhan, (1997) claims that there is comparable evidence that solidifies the definition of diversity; one that includes all life (biological) forms and processes, which is the foundation of what we generally refer to as our biological diversity. According to Nabhan, (1997) there is a relationship between life form on the planet and our appreciation for human diversity:

> "[Wherever] empires have spread to suppress other cultures' language and tenure traditions. The loss of biodiversity has been dramatic" (37).

Nabhan quotes Latin American ethnobiologist Bob Bye, who warns that "[biological] diversity depends on human diversity" (38).

According to Hall (1988), culture is central to understanding struggles over meaning, identity, and power. He is convinced that there is a relationship between culture and politics, as well as power and subjectivity. Additionally, Hall's work provides a vital theoretical framework for establishing pedagogy as one of the pillars of politics and practice of cultural production. He contends that in order to comprehend pedagogy as a mode of cultural criticism, one needs to question the conditions under which knowledge and identifications are produced, and subject positions are accepted or denied (Hall, 1988). For theorists such as Hall, among others, culture is a strategic pedagogical and political terrain whose force as a 'crucial site and weapon of power in the modern world' can, in part, be understood in its contextual specificity (Gilroy, 2000 p. 135). Hall's attention to the relationship between culture and politics provides a valuable theoretical service to educators by contributing to a notion of public pedagogy that makes the pedagogy a defining principle of cultural politics (Gilroy, 2000).

According to Hooks (1994),

> "When we, as educators allow our pedagogy to be redically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world…. We can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberating liberal arts education". (p.44)

Campbell, (1999) argues for the use of democratic practices in the classroom. These practices entail setting rules and regulations, empowering students, raising issues and resolving eventual conflicts. Although these rules can be applied to any classroom, they are particularly essential in the international classroom with its multicultural compositon of students especially with regard to complex and sensitive issues. These issues generally require substantial cross-cultural understanding and competence to navigate around. While Hooks (1994) declares that there is more anxiety in diverse classroom settings where critical pedagogy is applied, there is also more prospects for community building and freedom to "talk – and talk back" (p. 42). An example of democratising a classroom is, for example, soliciting feedback from students (Timpson and Bendel-Simso, 1996).

Orientation courses can help students develop both knowledge and skills necessary to learn from diversity content and from others who are themselves different (Timpson, 2001). One way to learn about cultural diversity is to experience it on campus. Instructors are a valuable resource by the instructional approach adopted. This approach should be student-centred, interactive and constructivist. In other words, students are guided through inductive methods in order to express meaning. Subsequently, the diversity of the student population should become a rich source, one that serves to enhance the entire campus community.

Developing prosocial skills is another way of helping students in the international classroom and teachers are of indespensable value in this cause. Johnson & Johnson, (1994) describe one of the most powerful paradigms for breaking down interpersonal prejudices and promoting appreciation of differences. They discuss some of the prosocial skills: communication – listening to empathy and consensus - and group dynamics, that students need to work successfully in groups. These skills have become increasingly important as global collaboration and interdependence proliferate (Timpson, 2001).

Another resourceful scaffolding methodology for stimulating student development about sensitive issues in the international classroom is clarifying values. This is different in every culture. Teachers can assist in this process by helping students to clarify what they believe, posit the choices available to them, manage peer pressure to conform, identify their own values publicly and eventually act on them confidently and consistently (Simon et al. 1972 ; Wolfgang 1999). Being able to clarify value can assist students in making sense of what happens both inside and outside the international classroom. For example, if students hear someone making a cruel ethnic joke, they can weigh their options and understand the opportunity they have to associate their core values with a public denunciation of such insensitivity (Simon et al. 1972 ; Wolfgang 1999).

Teachers' emotional competence is discussed by Gardener (1983, 1999) and Goleman (1994). They both make compelling cases for including more attention to the emotional component of learning, especially in the event of fear and resistance toward cultural diversity and about others who think differently. Although students have acquired the same knowledge and ability in order to enter university, they will need assistance from teachers to navigate through the demands of learning. Diversity in itself presents unique and emotive challenges that require highly responsive sophistication to administer. Hooks (1994) argues that there is a need to adopt democratic teaching practices attuned with multiculturalism. Likewise, a similar approach is necessary when dealing with the fears and challenges that teachers and students face in the multicultural classroom. In such a democratic setting, Hooks states that it is the goal of transformative pedagogy to give students and faculty a sense of responsibility to contribute to learning (p.39). By facilitating students in cultivating greater emotional responsibility, to listen and adhere to their own beliefs, we are helping them in their general individual growth (Gardner, 1983, 1999) and Goleman (1994).

3.   Methods:

3.1.   Participants:
Students from our international programmes were asked to fill out a questionnaire (*see appendix 1*) consisting of 17 questions pertaining to the effects of cultural diversity in the international classroom. A choice was made for this group because it is assumed that this group would be best able to provide the required information. The questionnaire was filled out by 89 students (*see details in appendix 1*) from the Netherlands (55), Germany (16), Latvia (3), Bulgaria (3), Curacao (2) and Spain, Finland, China, Brazil, Slovenia, Switzerland, Rwanda, and Belgium all had 1 student each.

In addition, structured interviews were conducted only among international students (*see Appendix V*), by a Chinese student. I wanted to have these interviews done only among foreign students as I was merely interested in hearing from these students. This also provided vital information regarding behaviour – student to student. In some cultures, peer responses appeared to be more spontaneous and honest.

Interviews were also conducted among lecturers from in the international classroom. By using a list of 11 questions (*see appendix II)* we were able to conduct semi-structured interviews which provided us with some useful insights into our study. Additionally, some class observations were carried out during the second semester of the 2014 academic year. The reason for choosing this group was because they seemed best able to supply the information required.

After data collection, I decided to code the data using the Grounded Theory approach. This approach contained a set of research procedures which led to the emergence of theoretical categories. These categories were corelated as a theoretical explanation of the actions that determined the main concern of the participants in this area (Glacer and Strauss, 2009). I focused on three types of coding systems, namely: Open coding, Axial coding and Selective coding, whereby the axial and selective codes were based on the open codes (Charmaz, 2014). Thus the qualitative analysis which drew on information from the raw data collected as part of this investigation, provided

explanations, understanding and interpretation of the phenomena, people and situations studied. Ultimately, I aspired to examine the evocative and symbolic content of the information embedded. In other words, what I wanted to do was to identify and comprehend the underlying concepts, situations and beliefs (Bogdan, 2003).

Two sets of research questions were established: one directed to students and one to faculty members.

3.2 Research Questions (students):
1. How do students experience cultural diversity in the international classroom?
2. What role does cultural diversity play in the international classroom and how does it ultimately influence students' performance?
3. How prepared are students for the culturally diverse classroom and what strategies do they apply when addressing cultural diverse issues within the international classroom?
4. How could cross-cultural awareness be improved in the international classroom among students and teachers?

3.3 Research questions (faculty):
1. What general teaching method is most desirable when addressing students in the international classroom?
2. What role does cultural diversity play in the international classroom and how does it ultimately influence students' performance?
3. What strategies do educators apply when addressing cultural diversity within the international classroom?

4. Results

Nearly all the respondents felt that the atmosphere in the classroom was positive, relaxed and very conducive to learning. Core reasons given were new insights into new and different cultures, exchange of knowledge of other cultures, learning new perspectives and improvement of English language skills.

> "We have to speak English always in class, and so I think my English improves all the time and that is good…." (exchange student from Latvia)

A few students found the international classroom somewhat challenging in that especially when working on projects, there were, at times, challenges with regard to cooperation. Some students were more interested in their work than others:

> "When I'm in a project group with other students, especially German students, I find I am forced to work harder than I normally work and that is sometimes annoying. I am satisfied with a 5.5 for a project, as long as I pass it. But not with German students. They force you to work hard because they want to get a 9 or a 10 and they work day and night for this……." (Dutch student)

Cultural diversity plays a significant role in the international classroom and most students consciously elect to venture on an international programme based on the implicit connotation to a diversity in culture. They enjoyed the atmosphere and the

mixture of nationalities on campus. Sometimes some students spoke their first language when they were speaking with other students from the same culture. This was sometimes seen as a negative experience. However, generally speaking, most international students are good at speaking English, so the language used in all projects is English. Some students got annoyed when Dutch students – who were sometimes in the majority in certain classes, spoke Dutch all the time:

> "I hate it when some Dutch students are always speaking Dutch in class all the time, even in the project group meetings and they know that not everybody in the meeting is Dutch, they will still speak in Dutch." (Bulgarian student)

This was sometimes the case with German students as well. However, this was usually easily corrected if students simply communicate this to the students involved. There were also issues with faculty members: some Dutch faculty faced serious linguistic challenges and students have problems getting the intended message. Some teachers also had a very "Dutch" accent, which also posed the problem of miscommunication.

Students were generally well prepared to study in an international environment due to previous international experience: extensive travelling, lived abroad, have family and friends abroad. Seeing that most of projects were done in culturally diverse groups, students had to make compromises by being tolerant and respective of others' culture(s). Therefore, a constant assessment of strategies applied were taken into consideration. In order to improve the level of cross-cultural diversity in the international classroom, students believed that there should be an increase in the number of international students and the use of the English language should be stimulated among faculty as well as students at all times.

There should be a more open policy towards promoting an international culture on all campusses, according to some respondents. This should be done by placing the national flags of the countries where the students originate. Moreover, annual events promoting cultural diversity should be held several times a year. These events should allow students to show-case their country of origin and draw attention to the importance of mutual respect and recognition to each other's differences. The students themselves were interested in playing an active role in all this. Faculties should also be encouraged to attend and participate in these events. By showing interest and being involved in what students do, faculty members will have a better understanding of the issues among their student body. Students on the other hand could also learn more about the background of faculty members.

Faculty members gave no specific teaching method for use in the international classroom. One stated that in the modular courses that are given, students were obliged to study culturally sensitive texts and travel literature that discussed a wide variety of cross-cultural issues. Students are given three travel stories to study each week and they are asked to provide comments on them. Moreover, they must provide at least three questions from the travel stories. Subsequently these questions are discussed in class. Other students are obliged to react to these questions.

Almost all faculty members agreed that there is no such thing as a general teaching method as this is highly dependent on the content of the course and the year in which the course is offered.

> "We don't work with a particular method for a number of reasons: the main one being, books are outdated very fast. Moreover, with the advent of the Internet, there is no need to use expensive books as most of the information is available online, or from some other digital platform". (Faculty member)

> "We work with readers, which are updated every academic year. In this way, students are provided with recent knowledge and the costs for students are minimized". (Faculty member)

As to what is desirable, the comments varied. Indeed, there is a need to comply to the needs and wishes of the development of the market. More and more students are electing to do an international study and therefore the need for a multicultural methodology is urgent. However, with the advent of MOOCs and other online courses, faculty members are turning to an electronic learning environment (e-learning).

Another faculty member stated that the teaching method is generally agreed on by the department and that the issues dealt with are closely related to the projects being worked on by the students. Contents related to the industry are dealt with and there is no specific regard to cultural implications. Therefore, she had no influence on choices with regard to the international classroom.

According to the majority of the interviewees, cultural diversity played a very important role in the international classroom. Although sometimes there are not many students from abroad in some classes, the approach is the same. Everyone is obliged to speak English during class. It is also important to respect each other's culture and an effort is made to treat everyone in the same fashion. The atmosphere is generally good and students on average seem to enjoy being in class. This is reflected in the study results as well: students tend to be friendly and extra helpful to those who meet challenges in their work, especially those who have trouble understanding the assignments. This could be in the form of extra explanation or sometimes even with the English language. There are some students who have difficulties submitting assignments on time. In such a case, there is psychological pressure from the rest of the group to speed up the process or to encourage the student who is lagging behind.

Another matter of concern is regarding oral performances: some students are very nervous to give presentations or hold debates. Although students can take extra classes for this, there are other students who take it on themselves to help others. Here, again, collaboration is of the essence. Students tend to help each other.

Dealing with feedback can have implication for the international classroom in that this could affect a student's generic performance. It is, therefore, very important how this issue is addressed.

The responses provided were varied: one faculty member said that this depended on the nationality of the student(s). There are some students who would not dare asking

questions, for example, Chinese students are very shy and are sometimes afraid to approach the teacher, especially during class. A Chinese student would generally not raise his or her hand and ask a question. He or she would likely to save the question to the end of the class and then when everyone is gone from the room, the student would pose the question. This could be a cultural issue: Chinese generally tend to behave differently toward teachers than, for example, a Dutch or German student.

Another faculty member stated that the level of English varies considerably in some of his classes. In this case, he has a totally different working method. He would sometimes even split the group: the students who are better are given extra work, while the students who need more attention are given this.

Certain students tend to ask more questions than others. Here again, this depended on the cultural background of the student(s).

> "We are now working more with video-clips and web-lectures. This is a good way to integrate more culturally diverse learning methods and topics. This also helps us to work at a variety of levels even in one classroom." (Faculty member)[2]

One faculty member often works with case studies which, according to him, simulates a multi-cultural working environment. "Students tend to really appreciate this method of learning as it provides an opportunity to disclose cultural issues." (Faculty member)

Another mentioned that the strategy applied depended largely on the goal of the lesson. When practicing oral skills, such as presentations, debates, interviews, meetings and so on, a different strategy is used than when practising written skills like, reporting, letter-writing, essay writing etcetera.

In general, the strategy applied depends on the skills that students are learning.

5.   General discussion

For this research three key principles regarding cultural diversity in the international classroom will be addressed. These principles are mainly based on adult learning strategies (Knowles, 1989) and (Knox, 1986) and principles of reflection in action (Brubacher, Case, and Reagan, 1994).

The first of such principles is: *Getting Students Prepared for and Involved in Their Learning"*. Not only should students be prepared for general issues impacting their respective communities, they should also be aware of the international community to which they will ultimately contribute. That is why, getting students involved in their individual learning is crucial for effective learning experiences (Schatz, 1997; 1987). It is therfore vital that students, irrespective of their backgrounds, collaborate not only inside the classroom, but outside as well. This can be done by accepting that everyone learns differently, by exhibiting mutual understanding and appreciation for each

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[2] For excerpts of the interviews, please see interviews in appendix IV.

other's individual learning processes and expectations, and, as it were, putting on *Cultural lenses* - the windows through which we look. These cultural lenses exist for the learners, the university and the community at large. Additionally, it is important that students are assisted in developing creative yet critical thinking skills by combining research-based practises with fundamental concepts, thus honing the experience for themselves. Furthermore, utilizing innovative tools that help students demonstrate their skills: tools that go beyond the traditional methods, enables them to stay abreast with the latest technological innovations in the current learning environment. Blended learning - MOOCs, video-clips, weblectures and other e-learning media - enriches students' experience and communication skills by exposing them to a vast array of teaching methodologies, didactical approaches and cross-cultural issues.

Another technique that is applied is story-telling. Teaching should also be a process of sharing knowledge and experiences. Connecting life experiences to the content of the course is another way of providing students with the practicality of the theories of the course being taught. Most students value the stories shared by teachers. This sharing of knowledge could serve as an inspiration for students to share their own individual stories with the group. This knowledge sharing process stimulates students to provide information about their individual culture. Students tend to enjoy this aspect of teaching and learning, as it not only helps them to remember the issue at hand, but also provides them with a more vibrant representation of the subject matter.

Finally, a teacher's ability to apply openness and empathy within the classroom can be an effective tool when addressing cultural diversity. From a teacher's perspective, a culturally diverse classroom provides the unique opportunity to learn about other cultures and at the same time share one's own culture with others. Students should be encouraged to share their ideas and backgrounds by discussing interrelated issues. Before embarking on this exercise, it is important that the teacher prepares the class for this discussion by first divulging information about his or her own cultural background.

The second principle is regarding *Culture and Learning*: The way a student learns is highly dependent on the student's cultural background. Learning generally reinforces cultural identity and cultural development. That is why when teaching in the international classroom, it is essential to first be aware of how students were taught in their former place of education. Besides a dominant model that exists, every university has its own cultural environment for learning: a cultural map, so to speak. It is therefore of utmost importance that faculty members, despite their subject area, gain experience in multicultural environments in order to bring effective diversity discussions into the classroom. There are some faculties who claim that their subject area does not allow for matters relating to cultural diversity. Conversely, faculty and researchers in every discipline must be willing to further examine their specific subject areas in search of cultural diversity issues (Schatz, 1997; 1987).

The third principle: *Dialogue,* should be practiced on a regular basis when in the international classroom. Dialogue, in this context, is referred to as an experience of shared exploration toward greater understanding, connection, or possibility (Co-Intelligence Institute, 2001). Dialogue by means of group discussion offers ample opportunities for transformative experiences and valuable networking, both

professionally and personally, especially when applied in the international classroom. In fact, in a true dialogue, the aim is to move toward a greater understanding and a sharing of meaning. According to Bohm and Nichol (1996) and Krishnamurti and Bohm (1986), a process that leads to development of true understanding of meaning leads to transformation. When examining cross-cultural issues within the international classroom, it is advised to select issues that are relevant and conducive of lively classroom discussions, issues that are inviting and comprehensive, thus stimulating students' full participation. These issues might be sensitive and/or polemic as these allow for students to provide and examine their individual perspectives. Additionally, students should be encouraged to bring similar texts and articles by authors from diverse cultural backgrounds. In so doing, students are stimulated to play an active role in their own learning process, learning from each other in the meantime.

The introduction of topical, cultural issues from news stories is also a method which could be applied to stimulate cultural diversity in the international classroom. This could be an excellent opportunity for engaging students in a topic that might otherwise be considered too delicate to introduce. For example, by introducing a case study, a delineation of someone who is pressured in the office, due to socio-cultural motivations – one could communicate a subtle topic and postulate a valuable, tangible viewpoint.

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the effects of cultural diversity in the international classroom. Due to the fact that this investigation was carried out in the English language, there might be inconsistencies with regard to the responses from students whose command of the English language is limited. A similar study could be conducted using respondents' first language. Additionally, a majority of the teachers interviewed were English teachers. By interviewing teachers of other subjects, a broader perspective could be gained. Finally, although this research has managed to provide an insight into how cultural diversity is dealt with in higher educational institutes in the Netherlands, further studies need to be conducted into its effects in other European countries. This is why, it would be interesting to do further research into cultural diversity in higher education in other European countries.

6.   Conclusion

According to most of the respondents, the atmosphere in the classroom was positive, relaxing and very beneficial to learning. Primary reasons given were fresh understandings of novel cultures, an interchange of awareness of other cultures, knowledge of new perceptions and an improvement in English language skills. A few students find the international classroom rather challenging in that, when working on projects, there are various issues relating to collaboration. Some students show more interest in their work than others. Other have difficulties with the (high) level of the English language.

Cultural diversity has a vital function in the international classroom and most students intentionally elect to undertake an international programme based on the integral association with cultural diversity. They enjoy the vibrant dimension and the mixture of cultures on campus. Students are generally well prepared to study in an international environment due to previous international experience: extensive travelling, and having friends and family overseas. Seeing that most of their projects

are done in culturally diverse groups, students have to make compromises by being tolerant and respective of each others' culture(s). There should be a more open policy towards promoting an international culture on all campusses, according to some respondents. One way of implementing this is by placing the national flags of the countries where the students originate, in the main auditorium of each campus. Providing a platform where students can show-case their country of origin – organising intercultural events, for example, would be a way of demonstrating this.

With regard to faculty members, there are no specific teaching methods used to address students in the international classroom. One faculty member stated that in the modular courses that are given, students are obliged to study culturally sensitive texts and travel literature that discuss a wide variety of cross-cultural issues. Another faculty member stated that the department decides upon the teaching method and that the issues dealt with are closely related to the projects being worked on. Almost all faculty members agreed that there is no such thing as a generic teaching method as this is largely dependent on the content of the course and the year in which the course is offered. As to what strategies educators apply when addressing cultural diversity within the international classroom there was a variety in the responses. This depended largely on the nationality of the students and the configuration of the class. This also affects the broad level of communication. One faculty member often works with case studies which imitates a multi-cultural workplace. Students seem to really appreciate this learning approach.

7.   Recommendations:

There are some general recommendations that could serve to increase the efficiency and satisfaction with regard to cultural diversity in the international classroom. First of all, it is not necessary to spend time on improving the atmosphere in the class; seeing that most students who participated in the questionnaire thought that the atmosphere was very positive and conducive of learning. Instead, focus should be placed on the formation of culturally diverse project groups. Many students argued that it was difficult to reach consensus on deadlines, working attitudes and learning approaches applied by students from certain cultural backgrounds. That is why attention should be paid to group formation. Secondly, due to the fact that most projects are done in culturally diverse groups, students need to make compromises concerning tolerance and respect for each other's culture. There should be a more open policy towards promoting an international atmosphere on campus. One way of implementing this is by placing the national flags of the countries where the students originate, in the main auditorium of each campus. Additionally, by organising more cultural events in which international students can show-case their cultures in their own unique fashion, more cultural awareness is epitomized. Finally, faculty should ensure that the classroom remain lively and inclusive for all cultures, by way of video-clips, web-lectures, story-telling, case studies and the use of interactive materials. They should also make themselves available for students not just inside the classroom, but outside as well. Students need to feel that they are welcomed and appreciated. By making themselves available for students outside the classroom, faculty members could help to create a better learning environment, one that is conducive of learning not only from an academic perspective but also from a cross-cultural one. Therefore, addressing cultural diversity in the international classroom

serves as an excellent opportunity by establishing a rich laboratory in which students are primed for the multicultural arena in which they will play an active role.

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