

Building intercultural competences in a multicultural classroom

- Requirements for teachers and universities

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Abstract

Cultural diversity of students is increasing in the universities worldwide. Our key argument is that, among the other tasks delivered in a classroom, the multicultural classrooms can be used deliberately for building intercultural competences of students. This endeavour, however, can be very challenging. In this paper, we discuss what the building of intercultural competences for the students requires from an individual teacher educating in a multicultural classroom. The requirements can be divided into those relating to the characteristics of the teacher and those relating to the tasks of the teacher. Furthermore, universities are authorised for developing and implementing structures and strategies both to manage the diversity at the organisational level and to provide support for teachers managing the diversity in the classrooms. By applying a system perspective, our conceptual framework combines the characteristics of intercultural classroom, teachers' capabilities and tasks and the required institutional support. In fact, the tasks of the teachers are regarded to play a vital role in the process. The framework is developed

for enabling us to create measurement and predict the effects of the above input factors to the output of inter-culturally competent students.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, Diversity management, Intercultural competence, International students, Higher education

1. Introduction

In an increasingly global business environment, the need for internationally competent managers and employees is growing rapidly. Daily interaction with people having different values, behavioural norms, and ways of perceiving reality is becoming the norm rather than the exception. (Chen, 1997; Finger & Kathoefer, 2005; Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005; Salo-Lee, 2006) It has been argued that increased ability to interact with people from other cultures “not only prepares an individual for the changing corporate environment, but also provides additional skills for managing a more diverse workforce” (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001, p.59).

Today, an increasing number of managers and employees are asked to move from country to country, adjust quickly to multiple cultures and work well in multinational teams. They are spending shorter periods in any single country, which makes country-specific knowledge less relevant and the cultural training more challenging. (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Suutari & Smale, 2008) Even though there seems to be a consensus on

the need to give attention to the cultural aspects of international business, there is still uncertainty about how cross-cultural competence can be fostered. This is a challenge facing those engaged in the design and delivery of International Business education at universities. (Briguglio, 2007; Ottewill & Laughton, 2000; Ramburuth & Welch, 2005)

At the same time, there is a massive change going on at the classrooms of the universities. Due to the internationalisation of higher education and migration the student population is becoming culturally more diverse (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). As a matter of fact, the international aspect of universities is nothing new; the universities were traditionally formed as global institutions which served an international student body, employed professors of various nationalities and functioned in a common language, Latin (Altbach, 2004). However, it is argued that from the present professors and universities the current internationalisation trend requires deliberate adjustment. This is mainly because the traditionally elite universities become more and more mass educators.

According to the literature, cultural diversity in the classroom may be either an advantage or a hindrance for learning. It can be used to provide students with valuable practical experience of cross-cultural situations (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). International students may widen both the instructor's and the other students' perspectives on the world. Indeed, many instructors are benefiting from the heterogeneous cultural mix of students when teaching cultural awareness. (Ladd & Ruby, 1999) However, diverse cultural backgrounds of students do not automatically lead to the increased cross-cultural understanding (Berry at al, 2008). It has been stated by Ramburuth and Welch (2005, p.6)

that if poorly managed, cultural diversity in the classroom “can lead to increased tension, frustration and, at worst, the reinforcement of prejudices among students”. Hence, to produce inter-culturally competent graduates, instructors need to put extra effort on the management of cultural diversity in the classroom (Cant, 2004; Woods et al., 2006, Berry et al 2008)). The Figure 1 below illustrates our key argument that proper management of diversity in a multi-cultural classroom may increase the level of learning.

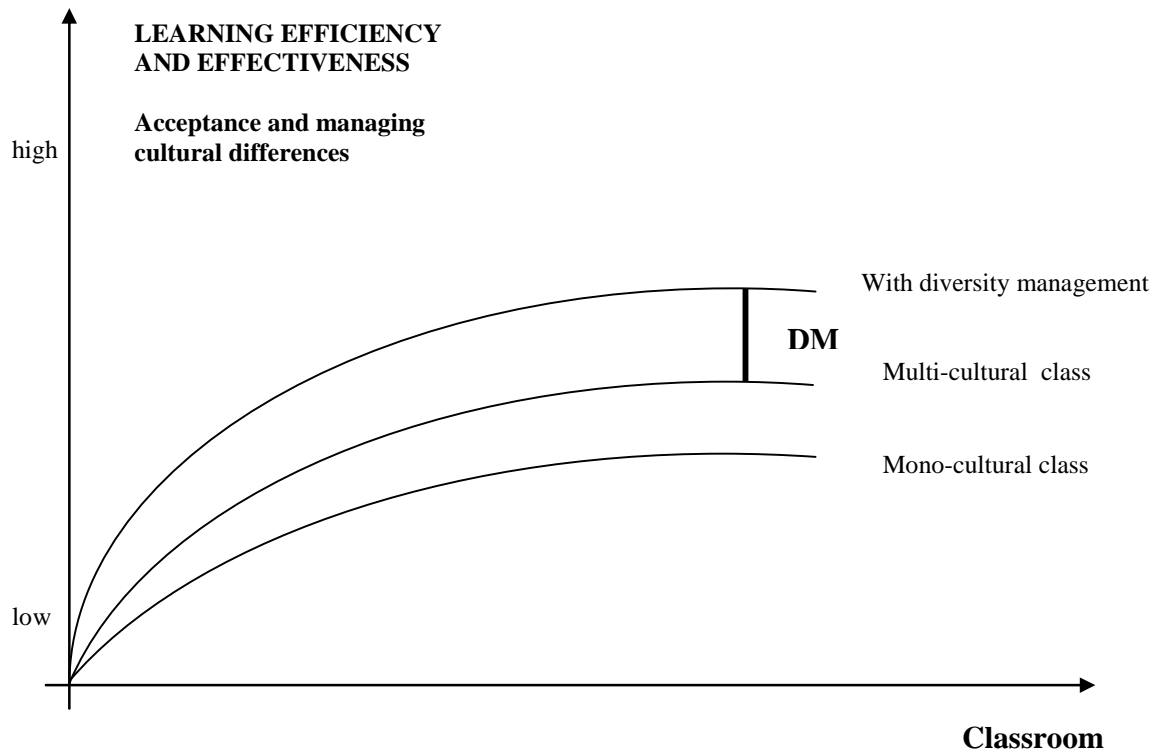


Figure 1: Diversity management (DM) increasing the level of learning in multi-cultural classrooms

Besides, extra effort seems to be required also from the institutions, i.e., universities. They face the challenge of providing structures that not only allow but also actively support the internationalisation within the universities. Attracting growing number of international students is becoming more and more important for the universities because

of the tightening global competition for the best students and the pressures from accrediting groups to internationalise curricula. It has been argued that since the number of international students attending university is increasing steeply, the quality of teaching students with diverse backgrounds will become a factor in determining the reputation of universities. It is therefore important for universities to ensure that international students receive the best education possible. (Altbach, 2004; Woods et al., 2006)

There is a vast literature on the building of intercultural competence (e.g. Bartel-Radic, 2006; Cardel, 1990; Huang et al., 2003) and an increasing number of studies that concentrate on how it can be attained in a culturally diverse classrooms (e.g. Woods et al., 2006; Saastamoinen, 2006), the latter concentrating mainly on specific techniques that instructors may use. This paper shifts the focus to the teachers and universities and aims to answer to the following questions: *What does the building of intercultural competences for the students require from an individual teacher educating in a multicultural classroom? How the university may support this effort?*

Based on literature concerned with cultural diversity management and intercultural competences, and applying a system perspective at the same time, we develop a framework, which incorporates three input factors. First, multicultural classroom as a forum for building intercultural competence is discussed and after that the focus is turned on individual teachers and their capabilities. Finally, the role of the universities is considered. Our aims with the framework are; to answers the above questions and to elaborate on the links between the three input factors and the desired outcome, i.e. inter-

culturally competent students, as output. Our empirical design will further strengthen our framework by proposing measures for both the input factors and the outcome factor. It is assumed that the proposed framework and the results of the on-going empirical research would stimulate further discussion on current university pedagogy and also provide guidance for university management.

2. Multicultural classroom as an arena for building intercultural competence

Culture can be defined as “a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problem of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” Schein (1985, p.9). Every individual belongs to several cultural entities (e.g. country, school, sports club) at a single point in time or over the course of a lifetime and each of these cultures influences the individual’s thinking and behaviour (Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005).

Authors have suggested a wide range of terms for people’s ability to deal effectively with the cultural diversity, such as global mindset (Levy et al., 2007; Nummela et al., 2004; Ottewill & Laughton, 2000), global competence (Kedia, 2006), cultural fluency (Scott, 1999), worldmindedness (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001), and intercultural competence

(Bartel-Radic, 2006; Salo-Lee, 2006; Neuliep, 2006), to name a few. Some researchers use these concepts as synonyms whereas others acknowledge slight differences in their content. In this paper the term 'intercultural competence' is used in line with (Bartel-Radic, 2006, pp. 650-651) referring to "the ability to understand the meaning of intercultural interaction and the ability to adapt one's behaviour to these meanings in order to produce efficient behaviour."

Past research indicates intercultural competence is partially dependent on personality traits, but it can also be acquired by a learning process (Bartel-Radic, 2006, 651; Levy et al., 2007). It is acknowledged that mere exposure to other cultures may make students better able to accept and manage cultural differences (Bartel-Radic, 2006; DeLoach et al. 2003; Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001). Consequently, overseas travel and study-abroad programmes have been used to promote international understanding (see e.g. Currie et al., 2004)

However, it seems that class-room diversity has not been fully utilised in the multicultural teaching, even though, the culturally diverse classroom can be seen as the ideal resource that teachers can develop in order to foster their students' cross-cultural competence (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). Nevertheless, it seems wrong to rely on that simply by being in a multicultural classroom would make the students more competent in acting in intercultural settings (Busby, 1993). Diversity needs to be managed (Iles, 1995), which means actively encouraging both local and international students to learn from each other and assisting them to think critically about their cultural experiences. For that

purpose, teachers' task is to deliberately integrate the development of cross-cultural competence into the course's content and curriculum, and choose/apply teaching methodologies accordingly. (Briguglio, 2007; DeLoach et al., 2003, Ramburuth & Welch, 2005)

Past studies show that students from different cultures tend to have different learning styles. E.g. the international students entering to study in the United States needed to learn to solve problems instead of memorising facts and they also needed to learn to locate information themselves. In learning-styles research there has been some discussion on whether students should adapt their learning styles to the teacher's teaching approach or whether the teacher needs to use a variety of teaching approaches in to enable students to stretch their repertoires of learning styles. (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Young, 1998)

Teaching approaches can be roughly divided into two classes: didactic and experiential. Didactic approach, also called as traditional approach, means that information is mainly passed on by means of one-way communication. Learning process is based on thinking. The task of the teacher is to provide 'facts' for the students mainly through lecturing. On the contrary, when using experiential approach the teacher acts more like a coach who attempts to involve students as much as possible. (Cardel, 1990; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Saastamoinen, 2006) Group works and presentations, case studies and simulations are examples of experiential learning techniques (Middleton & Rodgers, 1999). Experiential learning can be defined as a "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p.38). Thus, students learn by having

experiences and analysing them. It places a considerable learning responsibility on the students. (Hawtrey, 2007; Illeris, 2007; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Saastamoinen, 2006) Teacher's role is to set the foundation for learning by communicating expectations, getting to know the students, and assembling the appropriate physical environment (Auster & Wylie 2006, 338).

Using a variety of teaching approaches seems to suit particularly well for multicultural classrooms, where students tend to have different kinds of learning styles (cf. Volet, 1999). Besides, combining both didactic and experiential approaches is recommended in intercultural training. Didactic methods are useful for broadening people's knowledge of other cultures and they can affect positively to motivation and attitudes. Experiential approach are recommended for developing skills, changing attitudes, motivation and emotions, for instance. (Graf, 2004; Saastamoinen, 2006) It could be further suggested that didactic approach may suit better for culture-specific training, i.e. training that aims at making students competent in one particular culture. However, experiential approach may have more to contribute for culture-general training which aims at making students understand the variation in culturally determined behaviour in general. (cf. Cardel, 1990; Scott, 1999) The culture-general training has become very important, since today the international assignees are constantly moving from one location to another (cf. Suutari & Smale, 2008).

In respect of considering the multicultural class as an input factor, the links to the desired output (inter-culturally competent graduates) are the creation of the learning context and

various teaching approaches. In the next two sections, these links are further elaborated by focusing on the tasks of the teacher and the responsibilities of the institution.

3. Requirements for an individual teacher

We may assume that teachers ought to “practice what they preach” in dealing with cultural diversity (Campbell, 2000). Hence, building intercultural competences in a multicultural classroom requires first of all intercultural competence from the teacher (cf. characteristics of the teacher in Figure 2), not only because of the teacher setting an example for the students but also because in a multicultural classroom intercultural competence is needed for effective teaching. Intercultural competence can be divided into cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects (e.g. Ruben, 1976, Cardel, 1990).

Cognitive component (intercultural awareness) refers to how much the teacher knows about cultural practices in general; about his/her own culture and the specific cultures of the students. It is assumed that increased intercultural awareness implies increased understanding of different ways of thinking and behaving. (Neuliep, 2006; Yu et al., 2001; Cardel, 1990; Matveev & Milter, 2004) Myles and Cheng (2003) state that faculty should consciously strive to learn about students’ cultures in order to realise better also their own culture-bound behaviour.

Knowledge however is not sufficient; teachers need to have a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences (Chen, 1997; Ruben, 1976). This leads us to consider the affective component (intercultural sensitivity). According to Chen (1997; cf. Ruben, 1976) interculturally sensitive persons must possess the following characteristics:

- Self-esteem; a sense of self-value or self-worth. It enhances the respect of the situational differences in intercultural interactions.
- Self-monitoring; the ability to regulate behaviour in order to match situational constraints and to be sensitive to the expressions of their counterparts.
- Open-mindedness; the willingness to openly and appropriately explain themselves, accept and appreciate different views and ideas.
- Empathy; the ability to enter into another person's feelings and thoughts. Empathy allows an individual to show reciprocity of affect displays, active listening, and verbal responses, all of which indicate understanding.
- Interaction involvement; the sensitivity ability in interaction (responsiveness, perceptiveness and attentiveness).
- Non-judgement; the avoidance of issuing rash judgements on the valuable inputs of others, but rather sincerely listening to them during intercultural communication. Hence, one puts a conscious effort into listening what others say, instead of what he/she wants to hear.

Cognitive and affective components are the prerequisites for the behaviour aspect in which individuals conduct themselves effectively during intercultural interactions (Chen,

1997; Ruben, 1976; Sizoo et al., 2007). According to Cardel (1990, p.345) behavioural component is the most important since “it does not help [an individual] much to have positive attitudes and a lot of knowledge about local cultures if he is unable to express it”.

Even though teachers would be interculturally competent the challenge for them is how to actively promote intercultural competence among the students “within a classroom context, with time constraints and within the limits of course structures” (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005, p.8). The research by Woods et al. (2006) shows that language problems are one of the main concerns in multicultural classrooms, where varieties of English and different accents may further hinder the communication. Nevertheless, in the future graduates will need to be able to deal with different varieties and accents of English. Briguglio (2007) states that in intercultural communication the responsibility lies not only with second language speakers of English to make themselves understood (intelligibility) but also with first language speakers to develop skills for interpreting different accents of world English (interpretability). This also sets requirements for the teacher’s own fluency in English. Thus, it is suggested that teachers need to both speak clear English and understand varieties of English. (Woods et al., 2006)

Cultural diversity among the classroom often leads to misunderstandings and conflicts as different values, behaviour and ways of working clash. As a matter of fact, conflicts, if managed properly can be very valuable in gaining intercultural competence. It is thus important that the teacher is able to make the students learn from embarrassing moments. (Bartel-Radic, 2006; Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005) Thus we may assume that in

order to properly manage the diversity in the classroom, the teacher needs both conflict management skills and tolerance for ambiguity, i.e. “the ability to react to new and ambiguous situations with little visible discomfort” (Ruben, 1976, p.341).

Auster and Wylie (2006) propose that in order to create active learning in the classroom the teacher needs to create a context that supports lively discussion. Students need to “feel comfortable expressing personal viewpoints, assessing one another’s contributions, and asking questions” (Auster & Wylie 2006, p.338; Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Since the diversity tends to have a negative impact on affection (Watson et al., 1993), the teacher in a multicultural classroom plays a particularly string role in creating positive atmosphere and inspiring the students to learn.

Enabled by the above characteristics required from a teacher, we may assume that he/she is ready for creating the suitable context for learning and able to apply various teaching approaches. Indeed, dealing with cultural diversity in the classroom requires the teacher to prepare for it. Ramburuth and Welch (2005) urge that the teacher ought to gain understanding of the classroom diversity *before* commencing the teaching. They further argue that this enables the teacher to better understand the diversity, more effectively teach in the classroom, and more effectively maximise the benefits of the diversity in utilising it as a resource for training.

The diverse cultural experiences present in the classroom need to be made explicit for the students as well; they need to become aware of how their own cultural background

influences on their thinking and behaviour and they should be able to share this knowledge with fellow students. Teacher can facilitate the process by validating the diverse cultural experiences when they are shared. (cf. Woods et al., 2006)

In a multicultural classroom it is important that the teachers also make explicit how they see their teaching role and what role they expect the students to have in the class, e.g. “with regard to how “personal” relationships can be formed, the formal use of titles, allowance for interjections, methods of addressing the teacher and fellow students and the teaching style of the teacher”. (Woods et al., 2006, p.32; Myles & Cheng, 2003)

One of the most commonly used forms of structured interaction between domestic and foreign students is as group work in mixed cultural groups. In particular, multicultural student groups have been used deliberately as an arena for students to acquire cultural learning from each others. Intercultural student teams need to be well-managed for the best results. First, since students have a natural tendency to form groups with those with whom they feel more comfortable (usually people from similar cultural backgrounds), the benefits of working in multinational groups need to be made clear. (Briguglio, 2007; Cheney, 2001; cf. Middleton & Rodgers, 1999) In the study by Woods et al. (2006) it became evident that students felt it to be usually better that the teacher divides the class into groups with a mix of cultures rather than ask the students to form the groups themselves. Furthermore, since diversity within a group makes trust building and developing consensus more difficult, the teacher may need to act as a mediator in conflicts within groups.

Indeed, multicultural classrooms require substantial amount of time and effort from the teacher. International students tend to face learning barriers more often than domestic students due to several reasons such as e.g., different learning styles, language and communication difficulties (Pearson & Chatterjee, 2000; Woods et al., 2006). According to Woods et al. (2006), coping with the challenges of teaching international students requires the teacher to provide individual attention to foreign students. This takes place in consultation hours, via e-mail contact, and discussion with students after the class or even during class. Many teachers said that careful listening and making a special attempt to understand and empathise with international students were important part of teaching. In the next section, we discuss how the institution may support the efforts of the teacher to bring out the best results in terms of increasing intercultural competences of students in multicultural classes.

4. Requirements for the universities

Multiculturalism is a challenge for universities who should be able to manage the diversity at the organisational level and also provide support for teachers managing the diversity in the classrooms. Even though universities are increasingly emphasising internationalisation in their policies, the internationalisation at many universities has been largely driven by the individual academic staff members instead of administrators. (Knight, 2003) However, it is argued that in the increasing competition between

universities, the internationalisation has to be properly-planned, well-managed and long-term; it cannot rely on the ad hoc contacts of few faculty members.

Even though universities are increasingly emphasising the importance of internationalisation, the commitment of the universities to implement a long-term strategy, which necessarily brings in structural changes, can be still questioned. The lack of commitment can be seen in an international survey concerning the internationalisation by the International Association of Universities. It found out that although two-thirds of the institutions providing higher education had an internationalisation policy/strategy, only about half of these institutions had budgets and a monitoring system to support the implementation. (Knight, 2003) Thus, it may be time to turn rhetoric into implementation. (cf. Briguglio, 2007)

When speaking about their own internationalisation, universities have tended to emphasise the international liaisons they have formed with universities in other parts of the world. These institutional links with foreign universities provide opportunities for both faculty and students to experience other cultures. (Cf. Kedia, 2006) However, intercultural interaction inside a university at the administrative level is possible only if there is enough cultural diversity in the faculty (Iles, 1995). Furthermore, the members with different cultural background are expecting to be treated equally (cf. Bartel-Radic, 2006) regarding the assigned responsibilities, authority and accountability.

At the institutional level, support and resources are needed for diversity management (Ramburuth, 2000). According to Bartel-Radic (2006) organisational members need to agree, that cultural diversity is a valuable resource. Furthermore, cultural diversity also needs to be integrated into working processes and methods and, if conflicts may arise among the cultural groups, problems require openly discussion. (Bartel-Radic, 2006) When talking about international students we mean both exchange and foreign degree students. From a teacher's point of view in a multicultural classroom there should not be a difference between these two groups. However, from a university's point of view foreign degree students may need considerably more adjustment, since they need to be provided with the same administrative study support systems than the host nation students.

There are several challenges faced by a teacher of a multicultural class. One example is the assessment of international students' assignments: How to grade fairly students with diverse cultural background and different mother tongues? What are the strategies for addressing grammar or spelling problems? (Young, 1998) These are the decisions that are made at the University level. Thus, a clear University-wide policy would be needed to achieve consistency and fairness. (Woods et al., 2006) Another issue in which teachers need support from the top is plagiarism. Plagiarism is partly culture-bound; in some cultures knowledge is considered to be in the public domain, and in some cultures it is believed to be disrespectful to alter an authority's original work. (Ladd & Ruby, 1999)

Extracurricular activities are a valuable opportunity for international and host national students to develop social networks and learn intercultural social skills. They also help international students to better adjust to the host country. (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002) In practice, however, there seems to be a lack of cross-cultural interactions between different cultural groups on campus (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). In many countries, student unions are the primary actors organising extracurricular activities at the campus and thus they are increasingly facing the challenge of internationalisation.

Universities are dependent on large number of different actors involved in the process of internationalisation. Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, Industry, Immigration, Employment, International Cooperation and Development, to name a few, are critical players in the internationalisation of universities. Coordination of policies and funding mechanisms at the regional and national level is clearly needed in order to avoid ad hoc, short term, and overlapping efforts. (Knight, 2003)

To conclude, it seems that the institution, i.e. university, may support the students' intercultural activities on campus, and the teacher who makes extra effort in delivering task related to increasing intercultural competences of the students. Outmost important role of the university is in developing the organisational structure and evaluation policies that are explicitly smoothening the process of learning intercultural skills and capabilities.

5. Discussion

The figure 2 shows the elements and their linkages in our proposed framework. In multicultural classrooms the students differ in their learning and communication styles and the interaction is often hampered due to the language difficulties. Teacher working in the classroom faces a challenging task, particularly in case he/she intends to utilise the cultural diversity for building up the intercultural competences of the students.

Teacher should be interculturally competent, meaning that he/she is aware of intercultural issues, sensitive towards intercultural differences and also able to turn the knowledge and sensitiveness into action; i.e. effective intercultural behaviour. Furthermore, the teacher needs sufficient language skills that enable international students to understand him/her (intelligibility) and he/she also needs to be able to understand speakers with various accents and language capabilities (interpretability). Since multicultural interaction is prone to conflicts teacher would also need tolerance for ambiguity, skills for conflict management and abilities to act as a creator of positive atmosphere in the classroom.

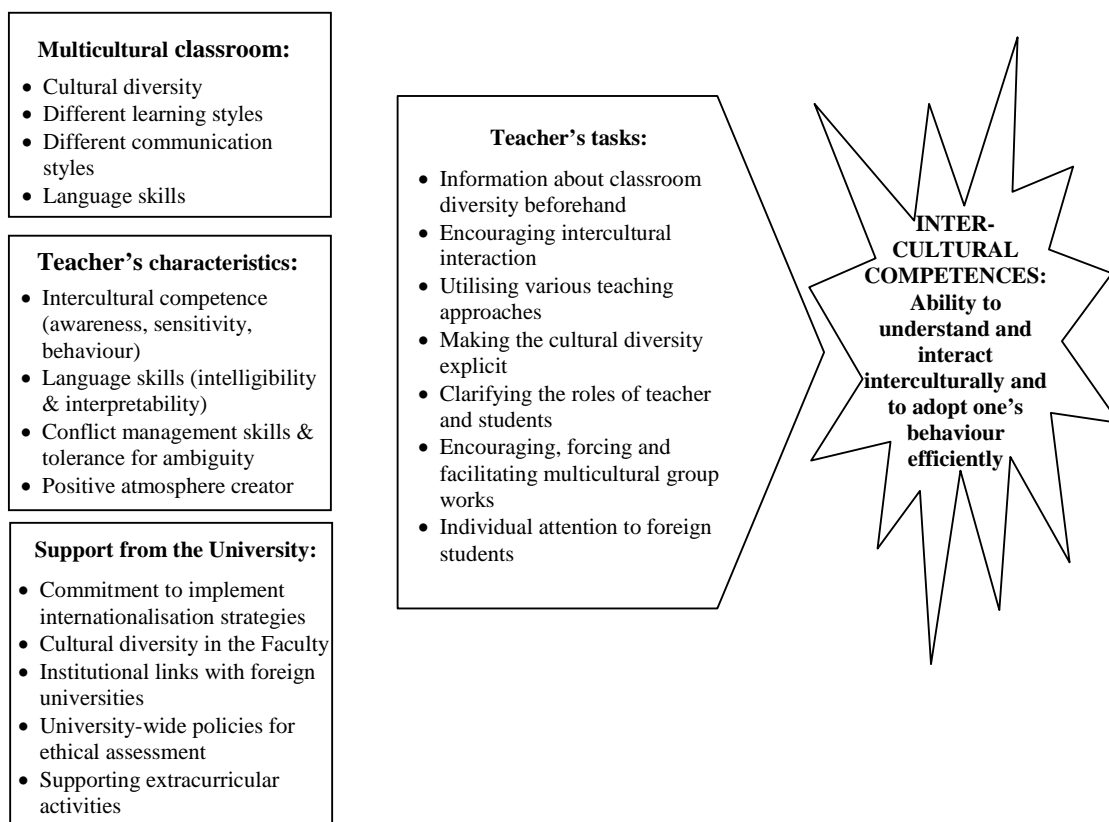


Figure 2: The roles of individual teacher and university in building intercultural competences for students in the multicultural classroom

The tasks of the teacher are seen as core process between input and output. Management of intercultural diversity would be easier if the teacher is able to gain knowledge about cultural backgrounds of the students before the teaching starts, since it would enable him/her to better take the diversity into account and also to make the cultural diversity explicit for the students. Administration of the University ought to be prepared to provide the teacher with necessary information on the students' backgrounds. Teacher often needs to actively encourage intercultural interaction, e.g. by encouraging and facilitating intercultural group works. Teacher should master both didactic and experiential teaching approaches and it is also recommended that he/she clarifies the roles of teacher and

students for the students. Foreign students may also require more individual attention than host national students.

Increasing multiculturalism requires a lot of effort from the University as well. The effort starts with the careful planning, management, long-term perspective and commitment for internationalisation. Rhetoric commitment may be turned into action by encouraging cultural diversity within the Faculty and by tightening cooperation with foreign universities. In accordance with the widely understood fact that feedback giving is central in facilitating any learning processes, the university may support the work of individual teachers by acknowledging and supporting the required extra preparation for intercultural classes, by creating university-wide policies guiding how to ethically evaluate and give feedback to students with different backgrounds. Furthermore, more of top-down policies may be needed in respect of dealing with the plagiarism. Unquestionably, university may also give support to extracurricular activities that would ease the adjustment process of international students.

6. Proposal for the empirical study

Our next step is to analyse the proposed framework in a connection with an International Business course titled “Managing International Business Strategies” run in our university successfully for various years. The course utilises a computerised business simulation programme. Choosing this course was further supported by the fact that it was awarded a

couple of years ago as the best in our country in developing business students' intercultural competences (the annual award by the Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration). In the course, culturally heterogeneous group of around 50 students is divided into small teams with the tasks of finding solutions to simulated managerial problems and two teachers share the responsibility of teaching. Explicitly, one of the aims of the course is to build international competences for students.

We will interview both teachers before and after the course. The aim of the interviews is to find out what kind of characteristics the teachers possess and what kind of tasks they took care of during the course, and what kind of role the teachers perceived the university to play in supporting/hindering the building of intercultural competences among the students. After the course teachers are also asked to evaluate the intercultural competencies of their students.

In addition to this the researchers will observe the intercultural communication in the classroom. Observation will be based on Ruben's (1976) behavioural observation assessment tool, which allows us to assess 8 dimensions of intercultural communication effectiveness: Display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, task role behaviours, relational role behaviours, interaction management, and tolerance of ambiguity.

Additionally, we plan to conduct surveys among the students both before and after the course. In the survey we aim to measure both the cultural diversity in the classroom and how the intercultural competence of the students changed during the course. Cultural diversity can be measured through questions related to languages spoken, home country, parents' home countries, countries studied and worked in and past experiences of other cultures through e.g. friends, neighbours and travel (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). There are various survey measures for intercultural competence, most of them related to the international experience outside home country (e.g. Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Fantini, 2007), i.e. the home internationalisation has not paid attention to. We selected a scale that seems to fit for multicultural classrooms (cf. Graf, 2004) and that has been widely used. It is the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by Chen and Starosta (2000). ISS pays attention into 5 dimensions related to effective intercultural interactions (engagement, respect for cultural differences, self-confidence, enjoyment and attentiveness). Since intercultural competence is understood to comprise besides sensitivity also awareness and behaviour dimensions, the ISS scale will be further supplemented with items modified from Fantini's (2007) measures on intercultural abilities. The data collection takes place in October–November 2008. Thus, at the EIBA conference we will be able to present some preliminary results of the empirical study.

7. Conclusions

In this paper we have discussed the challenges inherent in the management of diversity in a multicultural classroom. More specifically, we have identified teachers' capabilities and tasks that are required for the proper diversity management. We have also paid attention to how the universities can support the teachers in this challenging, but increasingly important endeavour. Since past studies have mainly focused on the ways of multicultural diversity management, but not on what it requires from individual teachers or universities it is assumed that this paper would stimulate further discussion on current university pedagogy and also provide guidance for university management regarding the structures that support teaching in university.

However, this paper represents only a first conceptual discussion of the research topic. The conceptual framework is combined from previous studies and its development relies on the practical but limited experiences that the authors have gained when teaching in multicultural classrooms, coordinating an international master's degree programme and participating in the university administration. Due to these limitations there is much scope for further research on both theoretical and empirical level. Theoretically, it would be interesting to see to what extent the concepts used in the studies on managing multicultural organisations could be applied to universities. Empirically, the proposed framework should be tested at various levels; within multicultural classroom settings, among a number of teachers, and in different universities. Naturally, it would be

extremely beneficial to compare the universities from different countries and consequently also track down best practices around the world.

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