

Teaching International Classroom: Dream or nightmare ?

Antwerp EAIE 2008 Session 502



Teaching in an International Classroom: Dream or Nightmare?

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Session Objectives :

- To share experiences regarding this topic
- To become aware of intercultural skills to teach in an international classroom
- To show some practical examples
- To explain theoretical background
- To discuss responsibilities and activities that can improve awareness/ competency
- To have fun and take home tips

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Programme :



- Introduction
- “What is the problem ?” Assignment 1
- Presentation of practical situations
- Presentation of theoretical background
- “From dream to reality” Assignment 2
- Take home tips
- Closing: evaluation and conclusion.

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Practical Situations: Introduction



- Interview with teachers in international classrooms.
- Teachers at NL Universities but different nationalities
- Themes:
 - Feelings about teaching in international classroom
 - How students and teachers perceive each other
 - Expectations
 - Striking matters
 - The role of the teacher
 - What works

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Feelings:



“How is it to teach in an international classroom?”

- Interesting
- Difficult
- A joy
- A privilege
- Enriching

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Perceptions and expectations



- Students expect:
 - more guidance;
 - teacher knows all answers;
 - different behaviour of teacher.
 - more fixet to read from books
- Teachers expect:
 - level of knowledge;
 - active attitude;
 - own meaning and being able to share with others.

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Striking Matters



- Leadership in problem-oriented projects: (European students always chosen as leader of the group, although they do not always perform well)
- Prejudices of peer-students about abilities
- Communication f.i. not asking questions of each other; present themselves
- Reluctance to drop the problem
- Silent versus speakers
- Content-oriented versus proces-oriented

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Role of the Teacher



”Do you take into account the cultural background of students?”


- In the beginning: explain expectations
- Build a relationship of trust from the first moment
- Stimulate active learning
- Give space to get used to it.

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Theoretical background Relationships



- Individualistic
 - Comfortable speaking out
- Egalitarian
 - Informal relationships – instructor as mentor
- Low uncertainty avoidance
 - Expect more freedom in how they do things
- Universal
 - Expect grading to be transparent and “fair”
- Collectivistic
 - May not be comfortable giving own opinion
- Hierarchical
 - Will show more deference and use titles – instructor as expert
- High uncertainty avoidance
 - Will expect clear instructions and guidance
- Particular
 - May expect exceptions to the rules.

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Theoretical Background Time



Monochronic

- Expect punctuality
- Lose respect if timeliness is absent
- May not be good at multi-tasking
- Will expect strict deadlines

Polychronic

- May not be punctual – but won't expect it.
- May not concentrate in the classroom
- Side conversations
- May expect flexibility in deadlines

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Theoretical Background Communication



Low Context

- Will expect an explicit verbal message
- Won't "read between the lines"
- Need to have a clear point
- Prefer linear organization of the communication
- Prefer pragmatic communication

High Context

- Will expect a more nuanced message...not too direct
- Will be concerned with "face loss", both professor's and theirs
- May be uncomfortable speaking out
- May not communicate linearly

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Skills for Teachers in International classroom:



- Self-cultural awareness
- Knowledge of cultures (specific to educational processes)
- Ability to see situations from different cultural points of view
- Awareness of being perceived from different cultural points of view
- Ability to modify behavior
- Ability to describe objectively what happens and ask questions (suspension of judgment)

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“Peer Tips”: what works teachers to teachers



- Invest time in forming relationships with the students.
- Create a safe environment where everyone feels accepted and not judged
- Pay attention to everyone, even those who don't speak up
- Tell them what you see (observe) and then ask them the meaning or why it happens
- Get them to ask questions of each other
- Stimulate the shy students
- Choose leaders carefully and from entire student pool

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“Peer Tips”: What doesn't Work teachers to teachers



- Ignoring the differences
- Working in homogeneous groups (or allowing them to spontaneously form, i.e. cliques)

Keep in Mind...

Not everything can be attributed to cultural differences.

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Thank you for your attention!

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