

E-1. MULTICULTURAL HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGES AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING MANAGEMENT. TEACHING APPROACHES TO MULTICULTURAL STUDENT GROUPS

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One of the challenges facing education professionals committed to creating a transformative curriculum is how to make up a multicultural learning community that is reflective of both our multicultural society and individual differences among citizens. To teach students to participate effectively in a democratic and pluralistic society, the teacher needs to respond to the needs of various groups within the classes as well as to individual students. Thus, the pedagogical challenge of individualism and diversity within the multicultural classroom mirrors that same challenge within the larger Latvian society.

Classroom management is how the teacher delivers the curriculum, as well as the environment in which students will learn. There are a lot of strategies that a university teacher can use in order to create a comfortable learning environment for all students. Teachers with the best classroom management usually have their class working and learning seamlessly.

Multicultural higher education challenges in Latvia.

Socio-political changes have brought about major changes not only in the European educational system but also globally. Today European society, which Latvia is a part of, is more culturally diverse than ever before. Many teachers who were accustomed to teaching at monocultural groups are suddenly confronted with the reality of having to cope with students of other cultural groups in their classrooms.

Diversity in higher education and multicultural education have been addressed by non-state actors for quite a long time, but it is now slowly emerging on the official agenda, and there are attempts to explicitly start dealing with the adoption of multicultural and intercultural educational standards, programs, methods and curricula.

International educational environment is expanding and ERA-SMUS exchange programs are developing extensively bringing new challenges and problem solving tasks for education providers.

Today, higher education has become a marketed commodity - the number of students enrolled and the amount of research produced, has increased the financial autonomy of higher education institutions. Many have taken advantage of this to earn income from sources other than government. This has promoted what today is called the 'entrepreneurial university'. National concerns and social expectations are being replaced by profit considerations, and market forces now decide the purpose and priorities of

higher education.

Public universities no longer rely entirely on the state for their funding. Governments encourage entrepreneurial activities in HE which generate income and a closer interaction between universities and productive sectors, especially in R&D. Furthermore, many governments have allowed the private sector to open and operate institutions of higher education – a sector which is growing rapidly in many developing countries. All of these have made market forces in higher education very strong.

The modern workplace and education. Modern universities are mass institutions in a good sense. A large section of the active working population is actively engaged in higher education. The total number of foreign students in Latvia is not high – an average 1.6% of all students, but over the last few years, the number of foreign students has a tendency to increase, and in 2011/2012 academic year, the percentage was already 2.8%. Slightly more than 50% of all foreign students are third country nationals.

It should be mentioned that in the report on the exportability of higher education commissioned by the Latvian State Chancellery, it was concluded that, in general, an influx of foreign students could influence the Latvian education system in a positive manner, especially the quality of studies, by creating a more multicultural educational environment, introducing other learning methods and allowing local students to prepare for employment in a culturally diverse environment.

No matter what profession you choose, more than likely, you will be asked to contribute to a team, most of which are multicultural nowadays. Teams are found in many modern workplace environments in fields ranging from engineering and health care to journalism and foreign policy. More than ever employers are looking for ways to combine individual talents and harness the synergy of a high performance team. As a result, many higher educational programs now encourage collaborative or teamwork component in educational curriculums.

Effective teaching approaches for multicultural classroom.

Giving our adherence to this imperative, imposed by life itself, we launched the Systemic Approach Programme (SAP) at Information Systems Management Institute. The focus was on problem solving, case study, discovery technique and effective communication.

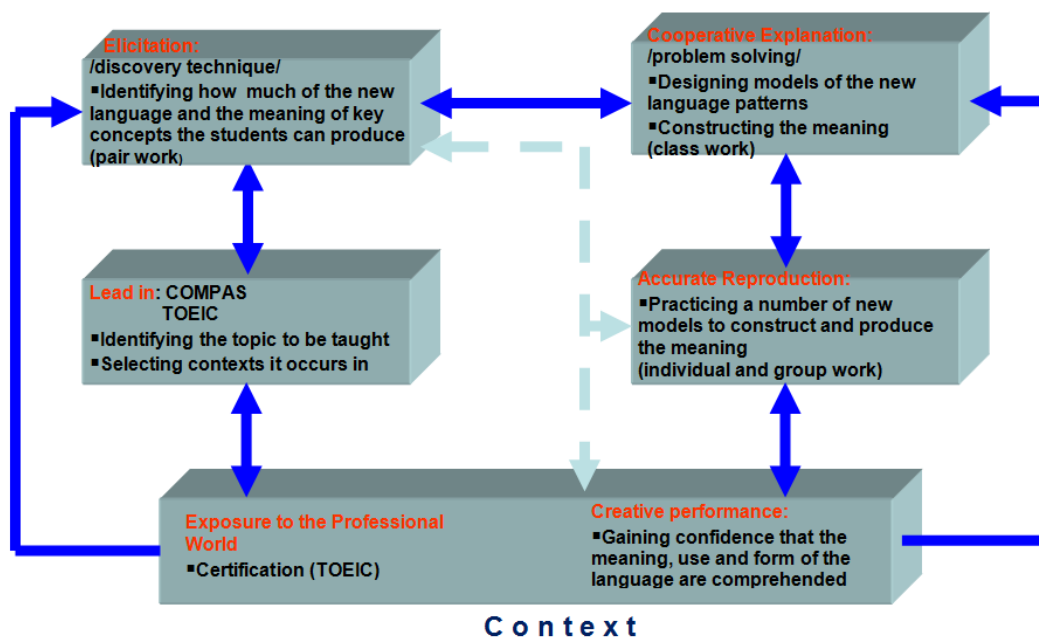


Fig. 1. Interactive construction of meaning.

Dialogue has become a central element of our model of classroom practice, which has considerable promise as a case study, problem-solving and decision-making philosophy and technology. We also argue that dialogue is necessary as a vehicle for understanding cultures.

Mixed-nationality groups study together with ERASMUS exchange program students who come from different countries. They all have different cultural backgrounds and different English language experience and competences. So multicultural education isn't just about how our students may differ, but about what happens in our classes when we are all interacting and constructing meaning in the created atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect through our uniqueness (Fig.1).

Thus, in the interactive process of constructing meaning new abilities appear - emergent abilities. A model of interactive construction of meaning reflects five stages: *lead-in*, *elicitation*, *cooperative*, *explanation*, *accurate reproduction* and *creative performance*. Educational process, which carries a cyclic character, has a form of a spiral plan. The starting point of a cycle is characterized by a certain level of student preparedness to solve communicative language problems, whereas the end of a cycle reflects a new, higher level of student preparedness which, in its turn, will be the starting point for the following new cycle. A cycle can comprise a single educational event (task fulfillment), a lesson or the whole academic course, depending on the aim of the educational process.

The final point of a cycle reflects a certain level of communicative language competence – the ability to comprehend, construct and implement grammatically correct meaningful language units – utterances – in written or spoken form. Thus, every final organization of cognitive structures in a cycle differs from the initial one.

If the initial stage of a cycle is characterized by student readiness to solve cognitive and practical tasks, the focus of the final stage is on skills and strategies acquisition, their further implementation and transference onto other contexts and disciplines,

generating new cognitive strategies, which promotes the appearance of new personal emergent qualities and ensures the conditions for successful adaptation within the following new cycle. The monitoring of these cycles of communicative activities by the participants leads to reinforcement or positive modification of their competences. This process is conscious and at the beginning of a cycle the participants are aware of the expected results.

Conclusion remarks. Successful multicultural learning requires an intercultural approach where students can come to understand that learning is about the generation of meaning, mutual reflection, and critiquing and expanding of ideas and concepts, and that this is most effectively done in a collaborative and non-competitive environment.

The structure and processes of higher education are transforming in compliance with international educational strategies and approaches, the main conception of which is to succeed in educating competent young specialists, who are 'thoughtful, knowledgeable, communicative, compassionate, global citizens' (Senge, 2004). Discovering diversity in a multicultural classroom takes creativity, extra effort, diligence, and courage on the teacher's part.

However, a multicultural classroom must thrive on these differences and use them as a foundation for growth and development. Differences command work, resolution, openness, and understanding. Teachers who address these differences and add them to the curriculum will succeed in creating a multicultural classroom that will advance the educational goals of all students.

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