

Teaching/ Learning in a Students' Hotchpotch

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Abstract

This article is a summary of 15 years working onboard merchant ships with a multicultural crew complement, 25 years on the rostrum at World Maritime University in Malmö, and my Licentiate dissertation. These circumstances have awakened in me an interest in how people with different cultures manage to cooperate, reach consensus decisions and are able to understand and learn from each other and in the classroom. The latter prompts the question how it is possible to learn in an environment with many different teaching styles together with colleagues having equally different cognitive styles. Cognition varies, but how does the individual assimilate a wide variety of teaching styles as well as the different cultures and way of thinking and talking of colleagues?

This article aims to pass on findings from data gathered in a study carried out at my workplace using students and teachers outside my office. It has become a special concern today to understand how a group of people comprising different genders and different cultures can work together and learn together. In shipping it has become even more important because of its global nature since crews are seldom from the same nationality but comprise a mixture of people from almost the entire world. Teachers and students world-wide need culture awareness training in order to interact painlessly and communicate effectively. A student's life at the four walls of the hostel-room and the World Wide Web (www) as the best friend is a recipe for withdrawal and misery. This article will encourage cultural awareness education and cultural sensitivity training at, in particular, education institutions for mariners.

Keywords: multicultural, crewing, education, diversity

Introduction

This article is a follow-up of the Licentiate dissertation "A mixed crew complement, a maritime safety challenge and its impact on maritime education and training" (Horck, 2006).

The statement that education in multicultural awareness is needed, perhaps, sounds a bit strange when related to shipping. Has not shipping always been international with many different nationalities onboard? That is a correct perception at least/or when talking crewing in the 20th century. It is very relevant today. The big difference is that onboard ships of today the crews are heavily reduced and the technology very advanced. In the past

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crews were much larger and the common language was and remains English. Although, the crews' English was not the best but with many people onboard there was always someone that could check a crewmember carrying out a specific work to make sure it was tackled professionally. Crew had a check on each other. Today, each individual crewmember is expected to both fully understand and be fully capable to accomplish a certain job. Here is the dilemma that leads to incidents and casualties. Although, many accidents have an explanation in crew fatigue and ergonomic constraints the underlying causes are deficient English, lack of cultural awareness, low morale arising from loneliness, irritations, etc. (ibid.).

The reason for still having a mixed crew is, of course, economic. Shipowners in the western world are recruiting crews mainly from The Philippines, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Burma, the Baltic States, Poland and Ukraine. The reality is that many of the crew from these countries have only a very basic English. This is of course a dilemma for the lawmakers who have not expressly stated the *level* of English needed to work on a ship in international trade.

Seafaring is an increasingly high technology skill that is carried out mainly by men. However, the number of women working in shipping is gradually growing. This has become an additional challenge on ship safety. Conservative seafarers are traditionally sceptic to diversity.

Isolation and loneliness are major problems as a consequence of a reduced crew. Fatigue has become a safety problem and occupational health problems are frequent (Grey, 2006, Lützhöft, 2007, Dealing with ..., 2007). The industry is trying to tackle these problems with new ideas perhaps not properly founded. The issue of crewing is one of these challenges. A mixture of seafarers *has to* work together and *has to* be educated together. Here is the challenge for all concerned. Whatever the context, if the cohesion between the crew members and others involved is low the chances for mistakes are high and for misunderstandings that cannot be afforded. I am convinced that an improvement to this increasing threat to safety lies in improved Maritime Education and Training (MET) where distorted stereotyping can be straightened out. Education should not stop at mere cultural awareness but also include cultural sensitivity training where tolerance and empathy is brought forward; a willingness to listen and an ability to hear.

The 20th century was a period of development of the widest diversity of transport means and this certainly also in shipping. But globalization also means that diversity is increasingly threatened, especially from those who believe that the best solution instead is that the world moves towards uniformity. Probably, education and understanding of diversity is a better solution. From a learning point of view "... diversity is a feature that produces deeper and more complex thinking" (Gourley, 2004, p. 67).

A few years ago the Norwegian shipping company JO Tankers (Frank, 2005) decided to replace all the company's ships' officers with Philippine officers in order to minimize misunderstandings; a ship manned only with Philippine. This trial continued for two or three years before the company reverted to a diversified crew with European officers. This time, in order to make the mixed crew function effectively, the company requires their crew to undertake cultural awareness training. Modern shipping cannot escape and be afraid of diversity and a professional MET must be prepared to give the necessary education. As long as the lawmakers do not request it a *proactive* MET will have to meet the shipowners' demand for such education.

The Study Objective

The aim of the study was to identify possible constraints that mature students studying in a foreign country with fellow students from many cultures, religions and languages perceive as a hindrance to good academic results. The study impact of the classroom environment as well as hours outside scheduled class hours has been the subject for this study. How do students' many cognitive styles cope with a range of professors' teaching styles?

The study is also striving to be a MET wakeup call for an introduction of cultural awareness education and sensitivity training into the curricula. At the same time the study encourages IMO to commission a model course on cultural awareness which might be undertaken by the World Maritime University (WMU).

Naturally, with the study follows students' general remarks on their education. Indirectly, these remarks could be regarded as an assessment of their education *per se* and then be part of the objective of the study.

The Study Sample

The World Maritime University, an apex maritime education institution, was founded in 1983 by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a specialized agency of the United Nations. WMU admits about 100 students from the entire world to the Malmö programs each year, giving a total student cadre of about 200 in Sweden. Successful students' graduate, after a 19 months undertaking, with an MSc in *Maritime Affairs*. The courses cover knowledge that stakeholders would find necessary in a country wishing to have an efficient shipping industry. The courses are in the fields of technology, law, business, administration, management, finance etc.

An additional 100 students are admitted each year to the programs in China.

The students graduating in 2007 bring the total of graduates from the Malmö program to almost 2,174 from 147 countries. Until now, about 35 percent has come from Asia, 32 percent from Africa, 14 percent from Latin American & the Caribbean, 12 percent from the Middle East & North Africa, and five percent from Europe and North America. The average age of the students is 32 years.

WMU has made efforts to attract qualified (not allocated) female students. Today, women make about 30 percent of each student intake. In 1983 the university enrolled two women.

WMU graduates take up senior maritime positions e.g. port and shipping company managers, ships and cargo brokers, ship chartering officers, government administrators, ship surveyors, marine environmentalists, maritime lawyers, policy advisers and educators; the last profession, last but not least, is the focus for this study.

The samples in this study represent students with seafaring background and students with academic qualifications. All students have professional experience as well. The first sample, 16 students of both genders, has been *randomly* selected for a series of conversations at: 1) the beginning of their studies, 2) mid term and 3) at the end of their studies. Each conversation lasted for an average of about 50 minutes. All conversations in the first sample are transcribed and analysed with a focus on Marton's phenomenography. The second sample of eleven *selected* students, with same mixture of gender and professional and academic mixture as in the first sample, took individually part in a conversation of about 50 minutes at the end of their studies. The conversations are transcribed and analysed with a strategy defined by Potter; discourse psychology. The selection of students, in the second sample, is based on academic performance and observed enthusiasm to talk and have an opinion. For clarification see table 1.

Table 1
The samples

Samples	Students	Selection	Study period			Strategy
			beginning	middle	end	
1 st	16	Random	x	x	-	Phenomenography
2 nd	11	Selected	-	-	x	Discourse psychology

Study Strategies and Theory

The study is essentially based on the dynamics of spoken words and sentences in order to express a student's world. In addition, the study includes observations of the students to find the impact that an individual student's behaviour, in different contexts and environments, has on colleagues' learning, behaviour and utterances. The latter play an important

role in formulating an individual's world.

The analyzing method is based on discourse psychology as presented by Potter (2004). In addition to a discourse psychological angle of viewing spoken sentences also a phenomenographic research strategy as presented by Marton (1986) is applied. Both strategies have been chosen as study strategies because they balance very well. To get information through conversations is not new and has been proven fruitful in my previous studies. The methods of analysis differ and were found to give useful information on cultural constraints and the impact of such constraints on learning and socialising.

The great majority of WMU students are not brought up with western thinking. In finding the truth (a debatable word in this context) the strategies normally used are philosophies by philosophers from the western hemisphere. Therefore, these philosophies are more relevant (probably) and pertinent when studying and observing people from western civilizations. People from other cultures genuinely have other references in life. To generalize findings from these strategies and their undertones give the interpretations perhaps less justice. Such reflections have not been systematically considered in this study. Students in Diaspora have been studied as such. With this in mind, it follows that a single understanding of a spoken word is not always obvious. "Language is not a transparent medium for conveying thought, but actually constructs the world and the self through the course of its use" (Wetherell and Maybin, 1996, p. 220). This statement is western world prejudiced.

Changing personal identities and dissimulation, which a person accomplish through talk (Loseke, 2003), give the interviewer (researcher) an indication of the importance of a statement. The interpretation of the changes can be clear if an utterance really is meant as it has been spoken or if it is a copy from somebody. Such a study can confirm if a specific issue is of real concern to the individual or if it is a triviality.

The conversation topics are related to the interviewee's understanding of his or her world in the classroom and how the teaching and the learning environment in the classroom have had an impact on the learning. Other questions have been related to the learning process in environments outside the classroom e.g. in the cafeteria, on the route between the hostel and WMU, in the hostel, on field studies etc., see figure 1. The latter has been emphasized by Bronfenbrenner (1976) in studies on appreciated learning constraints. To accompany students on field studies is an excellent opportunity to observe social cohesiveness between individuals.

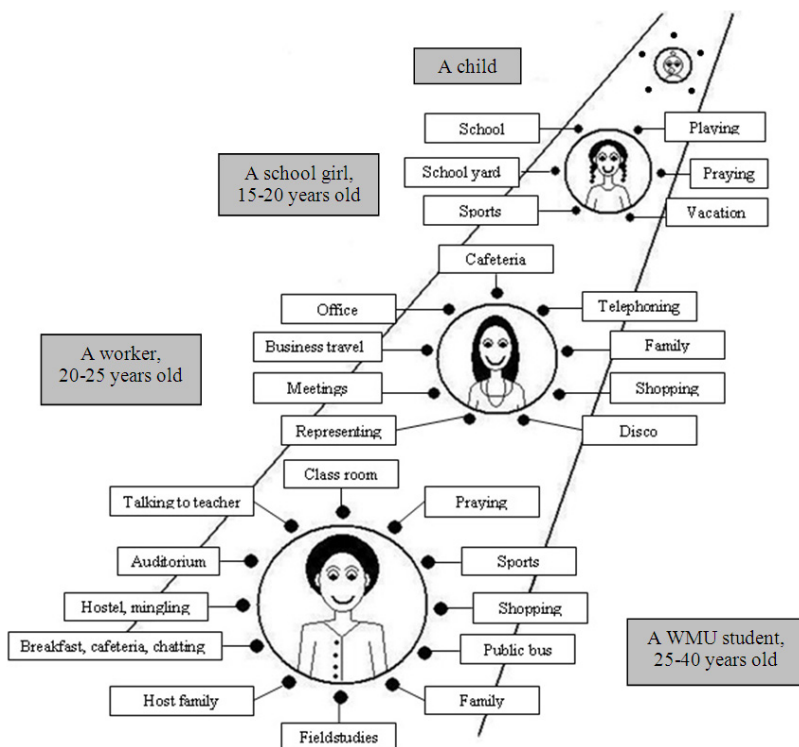


Figure 1: WMU students' study environments. ©

Various environmental impacts on human development have extensively been identified and discussed by Bronfenbrenner. He formulates a number of concepts in his theoretical system and emphasises what matters, in development and behaviour, is how the environment/s, are perceived. This paper has its theory founded in Bronfenbrenner's arguments.

The Collection of Data

To meet the objectives of this study all conversations with individual students took place at their study premises; WMU. Conducting the conversations at the students' own and familiar environment reduces possible tensions and nervousness.

The nature of conversation topics with the students are illustrated by the examples below. The listed topics featured in discussions both with the first and the second sample.

- a) When you arrived to Malmö, what did you find difficult?
- b) What expectations did you have regarding the educational program you

- were about to start?
- c) Describe your experiences of cultural conflicts at WMU.
 - d) What preferences do you take when talking to students not coming from a country speaking the same language as yourself?
 - e) What happens when you suggest or propose something in a discussion during class?
 - f) Describe with a few sentences your observation of the general socialising among students during your previous two semesters at WMU.
 - g) If you were asked to decide about the different teaching styles teachers should use in your course, which style would you prefer to encounter?
 - h) Describe your conversation with other students not from your country?
 - i) How would you describe your communication with seafarers here at WMU?
 - j) If you see somebody arguing or confront what would be your action?
 - k) Who do you mainly socialize with, where do they come from?
 - l) If you have any problem understanding what has been said in a lecture, what would be your move for clarification?
 - m) Give some reflections of the conversations between non seafaring students and seafaring students; the latter having a maritime jargon?
 - n) How would you describe the difference between teaching at WMU and at home?
 - o) Seen from a classroom point of view are there things that could be a handicap for your learning?
 - p) Some students ask a lot of questions; interrupt the lecture and aim to trigger a debate. Try to describe these students.
 - q) Elaborate on how you learn?
 - r) Explain your choice of seating in the auditorium?

The conversations were spontaneous and did not follow a predetermined order; the topics were developed as the conversation evolved. I had taken note of anticipated answers not to surprise myself during the conversations. By doing it in this way the sample stay relaxed. It was during these conversations and my observations of body behaviours that my perspectives and perceptions of stereotypes of students' culture changed. The simple conclusion is that despite of differences of culture, religion, language, history etc. we are all alike.

The sample was informed about total anonymity in the report and the transcriptions are kept in safe custody.

When studying people in Diaspora it is important to be aware that you do study them as such. If the aim is to study how a certain culture think or act, a cultural identity, the study has to be done at the research target's home environment. I am convinced that people in Diaspora *pretend* (also a reflection by one of the students in the sample) and therefore a wrong anticipation will be noted if conclusions are to reflect their culture *per se*. It cannot give a true picture of them as a cultural group. The pretending can last for a long time if ever given away. As a consequence of this it is important to tell the readers of the report how long time the research population has been away from home.

People alike, in the near social environment, will also have an impact on the habit of pretending. In this study the aim is not to focus on their culture or behaviour but in WMU and city of Malmö contexts and transubstantiate this information to assimilation onboard a ship. Onboard a ship people work in Diaspora, as well.

Study Result with Comments

The conversation findings are holistic comprehensions developed from the groupings constructed from the strategy of phenomenography and from finding a deeper meaning in the transcriptions with reference to discourse psychology.

For clearances, some of the responses have been sited in the report and for reasons of easy reading my remarks have been added in conjunction to the five interest areas that are subject for this study. The areas have been identified and are the result from the conversations. The five areas are:

- 1) Challenges for both students and teachers
- 2) Cooperation
- 3) Academic results
- 4) Cognition environments
- 5) The assessment dilemma

To include my own thinking with the thinking and expressed meanings of the sample becomes quite natural when working with an inductive research approach. The interviewer, purposely or unintentionally, cannot avoid being part of the study and that is also recognised in the two strategies used in this study.

1. *Challenges for both students and teachers*

The WMU teaching-staff has not been the subject of this study. Before taking up a position at WMU, many of them had not been confronted with a multicultural audience, although, in their work some had been exposed to other cultures. Some are relatively new to the rostrum but bring to the students their eminent and specialist knowledge of work in the maritime

sector. A teaching cadre of more than 100 specialists from all over the world is one of the unique features of WMU. Visiting professors teach on a *pro bono* since their prime wish is to pass on new knowledge. The teachers/professors also realize the importance of getting contacts with future prominent people in the shipping sphere.

From a learning point of view, perhaps, this large pool of teaching staff lends to some confusion in the minds of the students since teaching practices differ considerably.

Tesfahuney (1999), von Brömssen (2003), Lahdenperä (2004), Ljungberg (2005) and several other scholars have found that many students at professional educational institutions are not prepared to work in a cultural mix. Perhaps, through the *hard way*, lecturers/professors learn to adapt to cultural constraints. Macfarlane (2007, p. 14) has expressed a similar puzzle and has

“... often wondered why our universities do not provide similar support for the huge number of foreign students who must find UK education and culture so puzzling – and likewise for the teachers of such students who usually understand so little about the background of the people whose ideas they try to shape”.

The ethnic differences and identities become even stronger the more a mix dominates and characterises the environment. In such a mix the students tend to withdraw instead of challenging or engaging in confrontation or expressing difference inequalities of opinion. One can draw the parallel with school efforts to mix mentally handicapped children with “normal” children or mix clever children with less clever children. As a consequence of the mixture somebody will suffer.

My opinion is that one should avoid *forcing* culturally or generally different people to study or work together *unless* they have been educated or trained to live together; this is particularly important when teaching mature students. When appalling vibrations in the air is noted the learning will suffer. A savant student should equally not be sitting with “normal” students but preferably with peers; *nota bene* during lectures. During non-lecture time it is probably recommended that people being “different”, meet other people; in fact it should be promoted but still voluntary. Before mixing, those concerned should be given an appreciation of cultural diversity. In this scenario cultural sensitivity education should be promoted. Diversity is also a reference of differing talents. Gender is also a facet giving colour to the debate. There are schools in Sweden that consider splitting classes by gender, to give the students’ a less distractive environment. This approach is to run away from diversity. Instead, teachers should be equipped with the appropriate education, authority and instruments to teach in an environment of diversity.

Invisible diversities exist in society. Such diversities can prevent a meaningful dialogue. *Invisible diversities* people have to live with and if such diversities will result and have negative consequences it will have to be accounted for as a human mistake. Such mistakes will always be there and cannot be avoided. There are several such human interfering border-lines that can give opportunities for misunderstandings and wrong anticipation on *status quo*.

I have a feeling that teachers often act as individualists believing that individuals know best. This attitude does not lend itself to sharing knowledge and experience with colleagues; that should characterise a dedicated teacher. Teachers should realize that there are colleagues that can give ideas on improving teacher performance in a mixed classroom. Teachers must cooperate and loosen-up on their individualism. Good education and training is a partnership both between individuals and between institutions. The subject of teaching in a multicultural classroom needs all the attention it can get; it is an already complicated and new challenge for most teachers.

Teaching has for many years been based on the provision that teachers have uniform theoretical knowledge and uniform didactic skills. Standardized solutions were the solution to obstacles and difficulties in the classroom. "Practical pedagogy was the result of uniform thinking, ethics, moral, knowledge, established cultural patterns etc" (Lorentz, 2007, p. 59, authors translation). Modern pedagogy and pedagogy in a multicultural classroom requires a different view on how to pass on knowledge. Teachers have to adjust in the classroom to phenomena like: "hidden power, hidden assumptions and hidden norms" (ibid.). With this, it follows that standardization is impractical as can be seen in a student mix at WMU. Perhaps, with the many teachers that the students meet they find a different and "invisible pedagogy" (Lorentz' expression) a hindrance for good learning.

In order to be good practitioners both teachers and managers need to be able to sense the mood which the students or the staff might generate. Managers and teachers have to make an effort and get their subalterns to know and feel empathy. If this effort becomes fruitful, the subalterns will feel confident in their leaders; the teacher.

I further believe that if a teacher shows or even openly admits that s/he does not have the answer to a student's question, the appreciation of his/her sovereignty might be at stake. In a Swedish classroom such admittance most probably would not be a loosing face situation. In a multicultural classroom it might be. In order to protect the teacher, the students shall be informed that the teacher is perhaps not always the expected guru but a human who has the capacity and experience to research the question and answer fully in due course. In order not to confront the

teacher with such an embarrassment, Asian students in particular, do not ask questions in class and perhaps not after class either. Some students, by culture, refuse to express opinions or disagreements. Differing cultures therefore creates complications if the teacher in the learning program uses group-work or similar class activities.

The above dilemmas appear to be obvious challenges from both sides of the rostrum.

2. *Cooperation*

At WMU the students willingly share knowledge. And why should they not – there is no competition between them. By teaching others you learn yourself. This is a phenomenon perhaps not equally practiced in national classes with mixed cultures. The WMU concept is built on the students returning to their home countries to practice their new knowledge and to pass on knowledge to colleagues. With this attitude in mind it is not surprising that a western oriented teacher might feel surplus if the guru cannot be questioned.

Religion is sometimes a communication barrier and should be incorporated as an important subject for inclusion in discussions on cultural awareness. Religions can meet with mutual understanding and awareness. If something substantial and concrete can be identified to bridge the gap between diversities and that also can form cohesion between humans it would be a useful and welcomed catalyst. An interesting such substantial phenomenon is *Adam's Peak* in Sri Lanka (the scarified mountain *Sri Pada*¹). At the footprint of Adam (the first human on the planet Tellus): Muslims, Christians and Hindus, perhaps believers from all faiths, meet to worship the same physical feature. It is a pilgrimage that is made annually by many people from all over the world. So far, there have been no skirmishes between the worshippers; the opposite. Evidently, these different worshippers demonstrate tolerance and a trans-religious understanding.

All students in the classroom should find something/somebody universally to identify or sympathize with; perhaps even to hate. Normally this solves itself. But, if the students themselves cannot find identification the teacher should interfere and lead the way. If it comes to the worse a teacher, or somebody else at the institution, that the students do not like could be a pillar commonly to agree around; perhaps even to be a scapegoat. In the armed forces it is not uncommon to have a bad and a good. In diversity it might also be a factor to consider in efforts to maintain cohesiveness between members in a group, the class.

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<http://wmugw.wmu.se/gw/webacc?action=Item.Read&User.context=hj3iweSeejwakdaKub&Item.drn=115133z15z0&merge=msgitem&Url.Folder.type=Folder.UNIVERSAL>. Retrieved August 2007.

3. *Academic results*

Comparing academic results, with reference to gender, between the years 2001 and 2005 indicates that the achievements are virtually the same. During these five years seven female students out of a total of 99 women got an A-grade after the first year of studies i.e. 7.1 percent. Corresponding figures for men are 31 out of 374 male students i.e. 8.3 percent. In the second year eight female students out of 95 got an A-grade i.e. 8.4 percent and 25 male students out of 350 got an A-grade i.e. 7.1 percent. When the average of the grades from consecutive two years is calculated 7.8 percent of the female students got an A and 7.7 percent of the men got an A. Apparently the two sexes are doing academically equally good. Perhaps, the WMU women should have a better average! Redvall (2006) has reported that the average woman, in Swedish schools, is doing better than the average man. If this is generally so then it should perhaps also be the situation at WMU. Perhaps, the pedagogy is not suited for mature female students or there are environmental factors making the average academic result not much better for women. One reasonable explanation is that many of the female students have a family with children, i.e. there are obvious reasons for worries that could take time from studies.

Between the years 2001 and 2006 about 21 percent of the men and 13 percent of the women decided to write a dissertation. An option apparently more preferred by men than women. The women wish to have a wide spectrum of knowledge by choosing electives instead of writing a dissertation². This wide gap might also be explained by the female students not wishing to bolt themselves for an hectic period of writing but be more flexible in using their time; perhaps time used to look after their family and domestic affairs. With this not saying that the men also have an interest in families far away from home but perhaps an interest less explicitly.

For some students the result is not that important and an MSc is not an achievement that in it would enrich the students' future employment prospects. A number of students already hold a post graduate degree or certificate. An entry requirement to study at WMU is a BSc or equivalent. One male student and seafarer from Asia said:

IE: ... for me marks are secondary. I am already a professional.

For me it is enrichment. Even the master is secondary to me;
it will not make any difference to me.

Students realize that practical skills are also important to obtain in their education. To meet the students' skills drive the universities must adapt to the idea that the academic and the vocational are not at odds. The problem might be where to draw the line between generic skills and academic degrees. Worldwide MET is more and more becoming a faculty at a

² An option at WMU

university. In many countries master mariners end their academic studies with a BSc.

Universities make an important contribution to the supply of an educative labour-force and graduates can find careers in the shipping industry. There should be no major constraints to license vocational qualifications. Of course “there is an interface between where we provide education and where employers provide training” (The £80bn ..., 2007, p. 4) and maritime universities should not simply drift into training. According to the METHAR (2000) study, shipowners in Europe wish to have officers educated and trained beyond the requirements in IMO’s Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Convention. Vocational training is increasingly embedded in university studies; this with full justification because it serves both the industry and the individual.

4. *Cognition environments*

It is a well-known fact that humans have different ways of learning. The cognitive process in a non homogenous classroom must logically, reflect many more differences in the methods of absorbing knowledge. The learning process and knowledge gained is a function of how the individual has been brought up. At younger age’s knowledge usually is passed on by parents, relatives and friends, the religious representatives and foremost by teachers at schools.

Normally, there is no homogeneity in these processes. The process of teaching is context dependent and the student finds the best way of learning dependent on who transform the information. Any teaching therefore has to be done in a variety of ways in order to accommodate the students’ learning styles. If the students come from different upbringings and the teachers do likewise each student is exposed to a variety of new and unknown teaching methods. The study confirms that a very wide exposure to different teaching methods can be rather confusing for some students. For any kind of teaching and in particular for cognitive inter-actionists, learning is a process of gaining or changing insights, outlooks, expectations or thought patterns. To help students to adapt and change their understandings of significant problems and situations must be a teacher’s main goal; this is why I believe that a teacher should be a *facilitator of information* in classes where students attend higher education studies.

One way to minimize the risk of student *study-confusion* would be to develop and promulgate an institution-policy on teaching practices. In advance, the students could psychologically prepare themselves for a different teaching and learning environment to their norm. This might intrude on teachers’ sovereignty in the classroom but it would produce benefits for the students. A mental preparedness becomes more important, in

the classroom, when there is a student body of a cultural mix. The usage of firm educational theories is well exemplified in how young people are educated at Islamic schools (*the madrasa model*³). The Arabic word *tarbiya*, with the meaning of pedagogic, education and training, includes pre-defined clear syllabi on: intellectual training, social training and interaction, corporal training, moral training, policy training etc etc. This is perhaps something that could be learned from and introduced in MET in order to establish understanding between people.

There are several activities in the class room that can frustrate students. Such frustrations can be a hindrance for effective learning and the learning process. The many different habits and behaviours of teachers could give room for misunderstandings. There can be a complex interpersonal etiquette to deal with. A verification of this is demonstrated in the excerpt below. The student comes from SE Asia and from her way of expressing herself she reflects what other students have said with words having the same meaning i.e. she has not been chosen because of gender. She is about 30 years old with no seagoing experience. She is Atheist. IR is the interviewer (the author) and IE is the interviewee (the student).

IR: So, ... one can realize that people learn in different ways.

My question is do the professors, visiting and permanent, adapt to different ... learning processes?

IE: Yes, I think that all the WMU professors have tried their best to adapt to all these multicultural students but ya there are still some clear features of different professors their culture and their way of talking but I enjoy this multicultural teaching [IR: Ya, but at the same time you say that it can be a bit negative also All these different ways must be confusing for you] It's OK, [IR: it's OK but] ya, sometimes, ya, their habit annoy.

IR: Do you have any ideas how the professors might adapt to satisfy student's different ways of learning?

IE: No, I don't have. I think even in [my country] I can't be satisfied with any / with all the teachers and professors and I enjoyed this kind of multicultural teaching and if all professors were teaching in the same way it will be very boring

Student IE graduated with a very high average grade. A student with just a pass grade would probably not sympathize with the answers of student IE.

On the question if the teacher is the prime source of information

³ For further reference: Roald, Anne Sofie, (1994). *Tarbiya: Education and Politics in Islamic Movements in Jordan and Malaysia*. Lund studies in history of religions Vol. 3. Lund: Religionshistoriska avdelningen, Lund University.

another student, a man from Asia, interestingly said that:

IE: ... the teacher is the motivator. ... My major learning comes from books.

A teacher in a multicultural classroom will note that if there is something that the students have not understood during the presentation/lecture many students will not revert to the teacher but rather go to a colleague who has been noted to be clever in class. A second source for information is the www. At the computer, searching for technical information, the average WMU student spends three to four hours per day. If this practice is common and if students communicate by e-mail instead of talking to each other between four eyes an alienated student (same as an alienated seafarer) will be the result. An unhappy person cannot perform well, see figure 2.



Figure 2: "An alienated student" (my characterization).

Picture source: Caroline Ann Martin 3/02⁴.

Instead, students should take advantage of the unique opportunity, which WMU offers, to make friends and contacts. The latter is very important in the shipping industry. Students report that friendship often is not more than a reserved *good morning, how are You*. Generally, there is no genuine care and empathy. Many of the students being interviewed report that in particular the Indonesians are very friendly with all students and very willing to help. Teachers need to tell students that if they ignore relationships they are at peril. A remedy to this behaviour, a sad discovery, is cultural awareness education and then certainly good students will show that they are good also when studying abroad.

In general, students seldom interrupt a teacher or ask for additional clarification. In the western world much education is based on healthy, vigorous debates and exchanges. Such behaviour could be a dilemma if practised into the WMU concept.

⁴ Retrieved from www.mildstonescreations.com

To achieve a multicultural classroom society, does not call for any new and special virtues. "The question is rather, in what ways should the traditional virtues and attitudes be accentuated or expressed in a multicultural context" (Roth, 1999, p. 70).

When a teacher wishes to understand a student's learning method the student's both psychological and physical environment must be taken into account; an extension of Bronfenbrenner's environments. If the saying: birds of a feather flock together, is correct and in the classroom students come from many different cultures, it is evident that there are many different psychological environments the teacher has to look into and understand in order to perform well. Bearing in mind that the psychological environments also are subject to constant change, at least in the beginning of a course (normally, later in the semester it will crystallize and be more transparent, obvious and identifiable). A student's psychological environment consists of everything. His or her function and relationships at a given time puts a meaning to the person (Bigge & Shermis, 1992). This environment is surrounded by what a person makes of his physical-social environment or in other words the person's life space (ibid.). It is then a teachers challenge to be included in this the student's *life-space*; in other words to get the student's attention. This is normally not a problem at WMU because of a general high intellectual level among WMU students.

To be included in the student's life-space should not be a struggle for the teachers if the students are highly motivated and eager to learn. The challenge for the teacher is to understand a student's particular *life-space* and what impact this space has on the student's learning and effort to get good grade. A good method of support is to accompany the students on their field studies; a unique and supportive ingredient of the curricula at WMU. To understand a student's psychological environment and use it in context, and with respect, will simplify teaching matters. There is another saying: Tell me who is your friend and I will know who you are; a saying that adds to the first proverb and indicates how difficult it really is to get a good grip on this issue from a teaching point of view.

Another observation to a teacher's understanding of the students is the student's choice of seating. For example, it is not a new issue to understand the reason why some students choose to sit near the rostrum and some in the rear of the classroom. According to the conversation cited below the reasons might be different in a classroom with a culturally homogenous student composition.

IR: Where do you sit for instance in CP Hall: front, back or (IE: in the back) (laughing). Why you sit in the back?

IE: Nnnnnnnn I don't know. Maybe my behaviour (.) but in my University [in country X] I like to sit in the front at front close to professor but it depend on (laughing) / I don't

know Because the seminar is not too serious sir, I think (Horck, 2006, Paper IV).

Apparently, each teacher has to draw his or her conclusion on the student's seating choice. It becomes inappropriate to generalize students' choice of seating. The seating could differ from teacher to teacher and depending on the student's like/dislike of the subject. If a substantial number of the students sit in the rear end of the classroom the teacher should start to reflect and ask himself: why?

In the WMU situation the seating seems to depend on the language mastered by the professor and by the student's language ability. If the teacher is speaking with many expressions unfamiliar to the student the reason for choosing a rear position could be to be able to check the teacher's vocabulary with a colleague known to master the English. This can be done by taking a rear seat whispering without disturbing the teacher.

5. *The assessment dilemma*

Cooperative learning and case studies have many advantages. However, a set of problems contribute to a negative impact on the assessment of those students who by nature do not participate actively in group work. The reason for non-participation can be manifold but certainly inherited culture is one. Perhaps, when group work is assessed the non-talkative students draw the short straw. If so, with it follows an unfair assessment. This perhaps is the reason why some teachers avoid class-work assessments. One student, a man from Africa, expressed himself with the following remarks:

IE: ... my talking in class helps me (.). I only ask what is in doubt in my mind. ... This I don't think has any impose [impact] on my assessment. ... You must take also what happens in the classroom as a basis for assessment.

A good learning alternative would be to give students practical experience; job placement arrangements, internships or on-the-job training. A problem here is to evaluate the training, especially if the hosts receive students with no compensation or incentive. No doubt, to have fact-knowledge is very important within any area of education. "But to make them (facts and rule-based knowledge) the highest goal of learning is regressive. There is a need for *both* approaches" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 72, author's parenthesis and italics). Many students would sympathise with the conclusion on learning expressed by Flyvbjerg: "Concretely, context-dependent knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals" (ibid., p. 73). This is concretely realised by WMU students who prefer to take elective subjects in the 4th semester and to learn more and widen their maritime knowledge, than those students

who prefer to develop a particular specialisation by writing a dissertation. The assessment of the students choosing electives and those writing dissertations is equally valued.

Perhaps, general assessment practices have to be rethought to suit a mixed student body. In addition to the students writing exams and assignments it could be fair to include assessments in:

- a) Individual contribution-level in group work
- b) Individual classroom activities

To add these assessment criteria would be useful to a culturally shy or withdrawn student. A person in a managerial position has to build a talent in formulating ideas verbally. The reason for a) and b) is also to accommodate the students who are better at expressing themselves orally than in writing. Thus b) might be a hard challenge for all teachers because often permanent teaching staff do not meet the students for longer periods. It will therefore be difficult to remember their names and in addition the students' names are not very common in the western world and this adds to the averseness to class assessment.

Teachers should adapt their lectures to give room for students' thinking aloud. This would reflect a better anticipation of efforts and minimise differences in a student's various achievements. It will contribute to construct a teacher's sense of efficacy.

To properly prepare a student for upcoming academic challenges, the educational institution should have a written policy on assessment methods in addition to the teaching policy earlier discussed. Students are entitled to know how they will be assessed before entering their *Alma Mater Studiorum*.

The above is deduced from the conversations and interwoven some reflections of mine. It has been shown that Bronfenbrenner's environments also are very applicable on grownup students studying in a multicultural setting.

Future Research

This study has focused on the problems that can face students in a multicultural learning environment and awakening academics addressing a multicultural student body on the need to accommodate different learning styles. The environmental impact on learning has also been discussed. What would be interesting to picture is how the teacher cognate what the students say i.e. the opposite to what is discussed on students' cognitive styles. This reception of utterances, from the other side of the rostrum, assumable has an impact on the success of the lecture. This query, of course, is relevant if the students are allowed and are willing to interact in class.

Concluding Remarks

To get an understanding of how humans react and respond in a globalized learning environment, teachers and students, should receive some form of induction or stimulation training and exposure to an obligatory and new discipline: intercultural management (including cultural awareness education and cultural sensitivity training). This study has given a clear message that such a discipline would be beneficial to all involved in the educational process. The questions below have convened a positive response:

- a) Do the seafarers and the students in MET need to take a course in cultural awareness? – Yes.
- b) Is it necessary to raise the level of the seafarers' English skill? – Yes, because it is *the* thalassic language (since the age of Enlightenment).
- c) Is multicultural diversity benefiting the shipping industry? – Yes, with the same reason as the integration and promotion of women in the maritime industry as referenced in Resolution 14 STCW-95 and at the First Summer Institute in Women's Studies in 1981.
- d) In the 21st century, do MET teachers and students in MET need to take courses in cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity? – Yes.

In a modern society, each separate curriculum should have an element of cultural awareness as well as an element of the gender perspective. Experience and exposure to values of others give students and teachers an opportunity to develop and understand their own terms of reference and to better appreciate the idea of cultural challenges that can improve their learning environment.

A concluding sentence to underline the value of education in cultural awareness and sensitivity is appropriately expressed from The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): "Demonstrations and illustrations are needed to prove that cultural diversity is a source of enrichment for society. Diversity offers new capabilities, skills and opportunities" (Stenou, 2004, p. 129).

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(Non-English titles are translated and put in square brackets).

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