

# A descriptive study on cultural competence of teachers in English degree program

Anne Soininen

Thesis, spring 2012

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences,

Diak-South, Järvenpää Unit

Degree Program in Social Services

Bachelor of Social Services (UAS)

## ABSTRACT

Anne Soininen, Language: English. Järvenpää. Spring 2012. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. Degree Program in Social Services. Degree: Bachelor of social services.

This is a descriptive study on the cultural competence of teachers teaching in international degree program by analyzing the experiences of students. To achieve high cultural competence teachers should be able to acknowledge the immense influence of culture, assess cross-cultural relations and be vigilant concerning the dynamics that results from cultural differences, expand their cultural knowledge and incorporate this knowledge into their everyday practice and adapt the diversity among the students.

Data collection is done by focus group interviews and my personal experiences. The interview was structured on the perspectives of the role of professors/teachers in own culture, conflicts with teachers and their professional competence, cultural awareness of teachers and understanding the heterogenic backgrounds of students.

Collected data is analyzed by using content analysis. Collected data guides the analysis but theoretical concepts are applied to support the analysis.

According to findings cultural competence is complex matter and the students who participated to research have experienced lack of understanding on their culture in their University of applied sciences by teachers. Another finding is that international students need and expect more support from their teachers in everyday life outside the study institution.

Keywords: Culture, Culture shock, Cultural competence, International students, Content analysis,

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 CULTURE.....	7
2.1.1 Definition of culture.....	7
2.1.2 Cultural identity.....	8
2.1.3 Becoming part of the culture.....	9
2.1.4 Cultural shock.....	10
2.1.5 Acculturation.....	11
2.2 CULTURAL COMPETENCE.....	11
2.2.1 Cultural competence according to Leavitt.....	12
2.2.2 Cultural competence model according to Papadopoulos, Tilki and Taylor.....	13
2.2.3 Expertise of cultural competence in practice according to Metsänen.....	15
2.3 INTERNATIONAL STUDY PROGRAMS IN FINLAND.....	17
2.3.1 Personal participation of researcher to international study program.....	17
2.3.2 To care, to share, to dare – project.....	17
2.4 ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS ACCODING TO OAJ.....	18
<b>3. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	20
3.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS.....	20

3.3 DATA COLLECTION.....	21
3.3.1 Focus group interview.....	21
3.4.2 Personal narrative.....	24
<b>4. FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN PRACTISE OF TEACHEARS.....	25
4.1.1 Description of cultural competence by Metsänen.....	26
4.2 TOWARDS CULTURAL COMPETENCE.....	29
<b>5. CONCLUSIONS OF THE FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER.....	32
5.2 CULTURAL AWARENESS.....	33
5.3 USE OF CONTENT ANALYSIS.....	34
6. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	35
<b>7. REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>36</b>
APPENTIX 1.....	37

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim and the focus of this research formed eventually through several changes and numerous undeveloped ideas. The main interest always was among the international students studying in polytechnic Universities in Finland. The decision of the topic was challenging from several interesting ideas that the degree program elaborated. I had a personal interest towards the issues embarking from degree program taught in English as being a student in a study program. After deciding to make a research on problems of international students the research questions and objectives formed to be in the actual process of studying. In this thesis the main focus will be on cultural competence and social relationships and reactions and experiences from professional relationships to teachers in study program with international students. Furthermore, the aim is to describe the cultural competence in research environment and present options to increase the cultural competence of the teachers by analyzing and presenting the shortages in the competence. My personal experiences and the focus group interviews of international students are used as data for the research. The research begins with the theoretical background of culture, identity and cultural competence, explaining their definitions and forming processes. The theoretical part continues with the description of cultural shock and acculturation. Thus, the project "To dare, to care, to share," deepens the insight of the marginalization of students in university of applied science and issues in health care of student's focus of this research remains on issues rising from cultural differences.

The data collection proceeded in spring 2011 as part of the practical placement project in "To dare, to care, to share" –project. During process Diaconia University of applied sciences gave permit to utilizes the material for this research. The qualitative research methodology of focus group discussions provided the hypothesis for the research questions. The theories presented and the material from data collection guides the

analysis and conclusions. The findings of this process are presented in the end of the report.

It is important to remember that students in international programs in Universities of applied sciences may also be of Finnish origin or students that have lived already several years in Finland. Therefore, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to apply to all the students in international study programs In Universities of applied sciences.

On 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2012 YLE news (Finnish national television) reported that Finnish authorities have advised not to accept students from developing countries to study programs in Finnish polytechnic institutions. Main motive for the decision was financial struggle international students have during their studies. In this research some possible action for students support are presented as well. These ideas rose from data collection and topics sided during the focus group interviews.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter some of the main concepts of the research will be introduced. Theory of cultural competence will be introduced and concepts behind that. I will also describe the surroundings of the research and my personal implication to the topic since it explains much of the motivation I had for conducting this research.

### 2.1 CULTURE

When talking and describing culturally competent practice it is important to understand the concept of culture. In this section I will introduce the concepts and understandings of culture and use these definitions when discussing and analyzing the results of research.

#### 2.1.1 Definition of culture.

In sociological literature culture is defined with some matter. Haralambos and Holborn state that a culture can be defined in several aspects. Their conclusion is to describe culture as a “whole way of life of a people”. A product by humans and it is a result of human interventions. (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008, 663-664) In this context culture refers to a culture shared by a nation or continent at some extent. Similar behavior, language, and morals and values among nations and continents define the culture of the area.

Kieran O’Hagan explains culture by using a term “way of life”. He generates that culture is a way of life that can be shared in group, race, class, community or nation. The “Way of life” within appropriate cultures has been concluded in part by space, physical environment and geographical location that direct physical characteristics and the development of perception, emotion, cognition, interaction, adjustability and expression. Our space and physical environment provide much of the charismatic context for the processes and practices which give shape and form to culture.

The “Way of life” has also been shaped by the values, ideas, perceptions and meanings which have developed during time. These factors are shaping the world view the individual living under the effects of the culture. O’ Hagan has itemized main things that embraces to culture and elements that have influenced to individuals to adaptation to culture they have formed. These are such as : legends, language, religion, morality, systems of belief, mores and costumes, dress and diet, art and sports, education and the manufacture and use of functional tools and material objects. (O’Hagan, 2001, 233.)

Some of these characters are insignificant for the topic of this thesis and for the research done but it is important to explain the theory behind the concepts. Culture also effects to how we behave and react to and in social relationships, family life, birth, child rearing, adolescence, marriage, growing old, disability and death.

Even stated that Karl Marx never created a theory of culture his ideology informing of modern concept of culture needs to be taken account. His analysis presents the connection between the culture and inequality. In the context of society the exploitation based on different cultural backgrounds and socio-economical classes the theory of culture and the effects of it needs to be considered. (Baldwin, Longhurst, McCracken, Ogborn and Smith 1999, 95-96)

### 2.1.2 Cultural identity

French and Latin origin words “culture” and “identity” are pressingly important concepts in advancement of the person and the group, race, community or nation to which individual belongs. But both concepts are active concepts which are exposed to change and modification. Progressive advancement of cultures and identities depends upon general interaction, acquired knowledge and conjoint respect. (O’Hagan 2001.28, 234-235)

Cultural identity is the sense of similarity and connection which person feels in living, sharing and expressing a certain culture. That sense of similarity and connection may vary according to the several alternative expressions of culture.



One factor may be communication with same language while someone may sense similar attitudes to create sense of cultural likeness.

Cultural identity in this research defines the role and structure of the people involved in the focus group discussion. Their cultural identity demands the professional cultural competence from the teachers in order to sustain culturally competent practice.

The concept of identity is complex and has several aspects. A person may have multiple identities presenting their religious beliefs, idealistic ideas, sexual orientation and many more. On aspect of constant change of identity O´ Hagan presents a theory by Hall (1990) that presents that identity never reforms to be complete. Instead the fabrication of identity is an ongoing process. Crucial aspect of identity naturally rises from the exclusion of sameness and belonging to group. Identity might be threatened by diversity and differences but it can be sustained regardless of hatred actions towards individuality and personality. The obligation and loyalty towards origin nation produces recognition of identity and as threated or attacked it forms to clearance tool for disorder. (O´Hagan 2001, 28-30)

To understand the concept of cultural identity is important to reflect on the concept of identity as well. The identity of international students slides to distress with new cultural surroundings and effects their daily life and participation to studies.

### 2.1.3 Becoming part of the culture

It is stated that culture is not something that humans simply adapt to but it is stated that culture needs to be learnt. For this process in anthropology the term used is acculturation or enculturation. Psychologists use term conditioning. In sociological science the term for process is socialization to describe the process to become a social and cultural creature. In definitions of socialization by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1989) he emphasizes the interaction to other humans to adapt the models of culture and environment. He uses an example

of an infant which can be called as primary socialization from to stages of socialization. In this stage the identity of the person is formed. The secondary stage of socialization alludes to the impact of life experience that happens after childhood. (Baldwin, Longhurst, McCracken, Ogborn and Smith 1999, 7-8)

The process of becoming part of the culture is relevant to research to prove how difficult and complex matter adapting to a culture can be and how hard and fragile the process can be for international students. For this process the cultural competence of teachers is important matter.

#### 2.1.4. Culture shock

In 1960 Kalvero Oberg defined culture shock as an anxiety arising from the change of the environment, familiar surroundings, social contacts, habits and general daily life. When a person enters to a new unfamiliar surroundings coping with the change is a time consuming process that includes phases a person on new culture experiences. Rejection of new environment and idolizing the original environment are typical reactions during the first stage of cultural shock. An individual can experience symptoms like extensive change in hygiene, nutrition consumption, melancholia, anger blasts over minor issues, refusal to learn the language of the new environment, fear of violence and overwhelming desire to reappear in the country of origin. The amount of symptoms, duration of them and their strength depends individually. During the first stage of culture shock an individual experiences a honeymoon stage and is overwhelmed by new surrounding and everything fascinates the person. The second stage beings when an individual needs to adapt the ordinary conditions of life. This stage includes negative attitudes towards the new surroundings and elaborates conflicts in study, work and personal life. This stage determents whether the individual decides to stay or return to home country. Overcoming the crisis stage an individual slowly advances in the adjustment process. On third stage feelings of being superior and amusement out of new culture shows progress and recovery of cultural shock. The adjustment to new culture and

acceptance of the environment on fourth stage shows to completion of the process. (Oberg 1960,142-143.)

The role of cultural shock is relevant to topic because in this research from the data collected this phenomenon rises as one of the influence of the demand of high cultural competence among teachers with multicultural class. The theory of cultural shock and the symptoms described by Oberg are coherent in 21<sup>st</sup> even the theory was created in 1960's. The general global knowledge and communication possibilities between continents have changed due the World Wide Web but an adoption to everyday live and habits that create cultural shock do not disappear because of that. Students arriving to new surrounding clearly face several challenging with every day life issues and new academic surroundings.

#### 2.1.5 Acculturation

Acculturation means the adaptation to changed cultural surroundings and adaptation to the new culture as result of continuous exposure to different culture than ones original culture. In psychological acculturation the focus is on the changes of principles, approaches and character. Those changes affect to habits, worldview and actions of person. (Sam 2006,16.)

The process of acculturation is on going process with international students while they are acculturating to Finnish society. This process affects the wellbeing and general mental health of students who have moved to Finland to accomplish degree in University of applied sciences. This process needs to be remembered when concentrating on challenges international students face. In this research the focus is on cultural competence and the study environment and not in the acculturation process.

## 2.2 CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The aim of the research is to describe the cultural competence of the teachers in international study program taught in English of University of applied

sciences. In this section different models of cultural competence and a model used in previous research will be presented.

### 2.2.1 Cultural competence according to Leavitt

In “Cultural competence – Life long journey to cultural proficiency” Ronnie Leavitt presents a definition by Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs (1989) which according to Leavitt is the most appropriate definitions of cultural competence. According to them cultural competence is set of actions, approaches and guidelines that guide and support towards effective multicultural interaction. In practice cultural competence reacts to all levels, the importance of culture, the evaluation of cross cultural relations, and the awareness of the motions arising from cultural differences, the inflation of cultural knowledge, and the modification to offer services to culturally unique needs. (Leavitt 2010, 4.) Leavitt gives an important role for the understanding of the concept of culture to achieve cultural competence. According to definitions of culture in previous chapter it can be concluded that culture is learnt by upbringing and in the location of people’s lives are established. Culture is learnt from previous generations. But culture is also an emergent concept that is impacted by different factors as described in previous chapter.

To obtain a high cultural competence the following steps are demanded to be accomplished. 1, comprehension of the enormous effect of culture 2, ability to estimate multicultural relationships and be observant of the dynamics arising from multicultural communication 3, extend the knowledge and include it to everyday practice and 4, accustom to diversity. However cultural competence argues against adapting another culture or passing by ones culture to people from different culture. It is unnatural to achieve full knowledge of another culture. (Leavitt 2010, 4-5)

Another model presented by Leavitt has same characters as in the model created by Cross. This model was created by Campinha-Bacote for health care practitioners in 2002. In her model there are five characters that need to be accomplished. First a teachers needs to have a desire to obtain high cultural

competence by learning to understand differences and adjustable to different cultures. Having cultural awareness/sensitivity is mentioned after that. To obtain that a person needs to be aware of personal attitudes and thoughts on other cultures as well open-minded towards different thoughts. Third mentioned requirement is building up a cultural knowledge. To receive that goal a person needs to learn and study different abstracts and apprehensions of worldviews on other cultures. Next a teacher can develop the personal cultural skills by researching methods to use in practice. The final fifth part of the construction of cultural competence is the ability to face cultural differences and create understanding between people for different cultures. (Leavitt 2010,38-39)

Both of these theories also prove that cultural competence is a process that is always continuing and needs to be developed. According to these theories the improvement from culturally incompetent practice to culturally competent practice is possible after realization of lack of cultural competence.

In chapter 4 where the findings of the research are presented the collected data is analyzed through the models Leavitt introduces. In the reference the models are used to analyze the cultural competence of physical therapists and health care practitioners.

### 2.2.2 Cultural competence model according to Papadopoulos, Tilki and Taylor

Irena Papadopoulos, Mary Tilki and Gina Taylor presented another model of cultural competence. Their model was first presented in 1994 for health practitioner students. They argued that cultural competence results from gained skills and knowledge from life experience and is a procedure and product of those. Their model has four stages as cultural competence being the final fourth stage.

The first stage of model is cultural awareness. That requires self-knowledge of the cultural identity and the consistency of the personality. Cultural knowledge as second stage forms when a person is alert of one's cultural background and the effect of the culture on someone's behavior. Third stage towards cultural competence is cultural sensitivity. This stage forms from interaction skills,

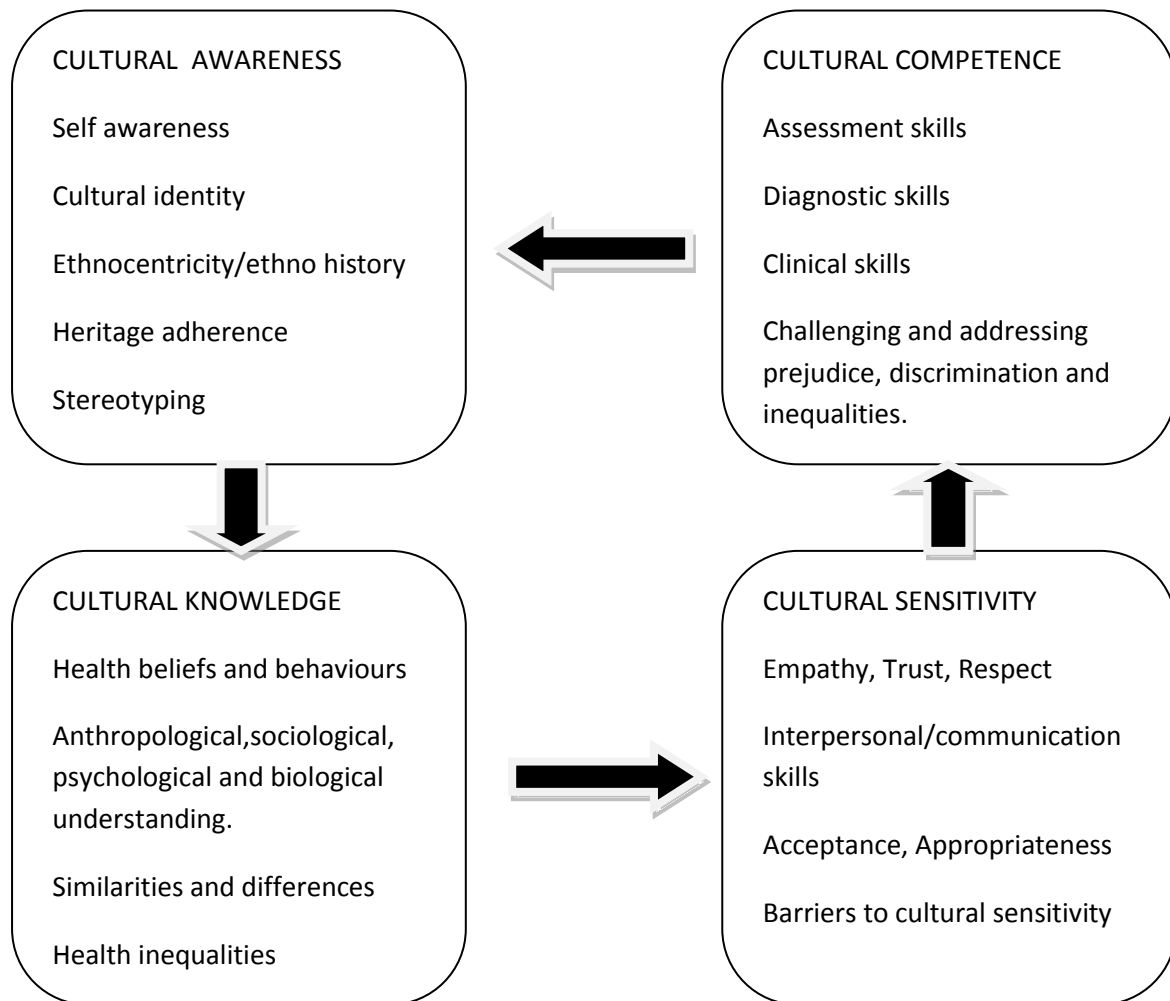
acceptance of differences as result of culture, suitability to understand multiculturalism and polite behavior towards individuals from different cultures. To achieve the fourth and final stage the cultural competence all previous stages should be obtained. Papadopoulos 2006, 10-21)

As the theories above this model presents the process of obtaining cultural competence. It has similarities with previous models and it describes same important characters for the process. Also the character of ongoing process in order to obtain cultural competence applies to this theory.

The theory of Papadopoulos, Tilki and Taylor also emphasizes that to obtain high cultural competence it is important that those four steps described are reflected together. On the next page there will be the graphic of the Papadopoulos, Tilki and Taylor theory. The importance is to understand continues, ongoing process of the progression of cultural competence. This will be presented clearly by the diagram that shows the idea how these steps actual are in circle and after the cultural competence the circle starts again from the beginning towards the cultural competence. The ideal progression is to deepen the competence in this process.

Also this method will be used in chapter 4 to analyze the material of focus group discussions. In chapter 5 where the findings will presented this theory will be utilized to describe the cultural competence of the teachers by students' experience.

TABLE 1. The Papadopoulos, Tilki and Taylor model for developing cultural competence



Source: Papadopoulos ( 2006,10 )

### 2.2.3 Expertise of cultural competence in practice according to Metsänen

Riikka Metsänen presents cultural competence as expertise that teachers have by the factors of knowledge, skills and attitudes and qualities a teachers should have and pay attention to when teaching in class with international students. In knowledge section in original model she refers to coping-skills. In her research coping- skills describe the students' capability to cope and handle the cultural change and stressful situation elaborating from change. (Metsänen R, 2011.3) In this table below the first section KNOWLEDGE describes areas that teacher needs to gain knowledge of in order to practice culturally competent practice. Second section, SKILLS and third section ATTITUDES & QUALITIES suggests

the methods and approaches of teachers to utilize in practice. In this research instead of the theory of coping, the theory of cultural shock is utilized. Therefore the researcher modified the table section of KNOWLEDGE and changed recognition of coping process to recognition of cultural shock. The theory of cultural shock is described in chapter 2.1.3.

TABLE.2 Cultural competence of teachers

<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>SKILLS</b>	<b>ATTITUDES &amp; QUALITIES</b>
Cultural differences.	Flexible pedagogical skills.	Self-awareness on effects of own culture.
Background information on students.	Planning curriculum for heterogeneous group.	Equality
Situation in country of origin. (political, historical)	Different teaching methods.	Tolerate stress and conflicts
Idea of studying and study culture	Different interaction and communication skills	Tolerance towards cultures and flexibility.
Recognition of cultural shock *	Conflict solving	Sense of humor
Prejudice in learning process	Interaction in unpredicted situations	Tolerance to cope with uncertain situations
Process of acculturation	Interaction with different people	Tolerance to function in unpredicted situations
Different interaction and communication methods	High language skills (English)	Facing people without prejudice

Source: Metsänen (2011, 57-58; translated from Finnish to English by Anne Soininen. \*Changed by author.)



## 2.3 INTERNATIONAL STUDY PROGRAMS IN FINLAND

In March 2012 there are 8 different study fields with 98 degree programs of Bachelor level in Universities of applied sciences over Finland. The degree is formed over expert studies, elective studies, and practical trainings and Bachelor's thesis. (Study in Finland) The students can be both originally Finnish and international.

### 2.3.1 Personal participation of researcher in international study program

I was accepted to commence my studies in multicultural study program at the fall of 2007. I participated to lectures until January 2008 but due the personal reasons I restarted my studies next fall 2008 in a third class of the program. Now in spring 2011 I have an experience of 4 years from the study program as a student. I have been participated the curriculum of the study program and accomplished elective studies in international class.

In my thesis I will also use my personal experience to analyze and reflect on the research topic and collected data by personal narrative. As not sharing the cultural background with the students participated in focus group discussions the role of moderator.

### 2.3.2 TO CARE, TO SHARE, TO DARE –PROJECT

In February 2011 I accomplished my practical placement in a project called "To care, to dare to share." This project aims to prevent the marginalization during the studies at universities of applied sciences.

The project was managed by Diak University of applied sciences and it had 14 universities of applied sciences participating around Finland. The project was a two year development project from 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2009 to 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2011.

The project was funded by European Social Fund (ESF) and the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in North Ostrobothnia and based on the alarming wellbeing of students in Finland and the lack of the

social and health services in universities of applied sciences for students. The project aims to create best practices for universities of applied sciences to help identify students' risks of marginalization and to support students in problematic situations during their studies. This project provided training for the staff of universities to help to notice students' risks of marginalization in early stage and guide how to create a caring atmosphere at schools to promote participation and wellbeing of students.

For improvement of students' conditions it is essential to find out the best practices to support the wellbeing of foreign students in universities of applied sciences and other universities. The project will make publications of the marginalization of students during and after the research. The main concept is the recognition of the reasons behind the marginalization of the students. In this process it is important to hear the opinions from the students themselves. Research what are protective and preventive factors for the marginalization. (Soininen 2011,5)

The general wellbeing of students and what are the factors to increase that is a concept that needs to be evaluated from the students' point of view. Evaluation of the general attitudes and atmosphere in the universities with students and their experiences of student unions will open up the baseline for the cultivation. In this research the role of the project stays rather small but the aim is to show the level of cultural competence in one university of applied sciences participating the project and discuss the possible effects of cultural awareness in well being of students and prevention of marginalization.

#### 2.4 ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS ACCORDING TO OAJ

Teachers have an important role in the society and in the development of the members of the society. The profession requires high professional ethics and morals. The trade union of education in Finland (OAJ) has modified ethic guidelines to teachers. According to their webpage 95 percent of the teachers

are members of the trade union. The ethical guidelines are based on human dignity, truthful actions, justice and responsibility of teachers.

These guidelines state that teacher must respect the rights of the student and react to students with justice and humanity and treats them with dignity and respect. The teacher attempts to understand the backgrounds, opinions and thinking of students and emphasizes on the students that need special care and protection. Teachers have a responsibility to guide the students to be collaborative and honorary members of the society. (OAJ)

Teacher with multicultural students face more challenge in their work due the heterogenic background of the students. They are challenged to emphasize and understand unfamiliar backgrounds and interaction skills of the students. Most of the international students also require more effort to be guided successfully to be members of the society.

In this research these principles are used as guidelines and the professional requirements for the teachers in University of applied sciences. According Metsänen on article of cultural competence of teachers in vocational education she states that teachers have different academic backgrounds the pedagogical studies teachers need to have in order to practice teaching do not include skills of cultural competence. (Metsänen and Kämäräinen.1-2) This applies also to teachers in University of applied sciences.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology consists of the tools and approach the researcher has used in conducting the study. The character of this study is qualitative research as it focuses on the experiences of the students. My role is to analyze and discuss; therefore the type of qualitative methodology used in this thesis is content analysis. This chapter will introduce the research question as well as describe the focus group interview and the data used in the analysis.

#### 3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of the research is to study the cultural competence of the teachers in international degree program taught in English. Consequently, the research questions are what does cultural competence mean? Are the teachers culturally competent? And how a teacher can persist cultural competence? Therefore the main focus is in the ability and quality of cultural competence. The competence will be evaluated through the role of professors/teachers in the culture of origin of students, by conflicts with teachers and their professional competence, the general cultural awareness of teachers and their ability to understand the heterogenic backgrounds of students.

#### 3.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS

The method content analysis was chosen because it seemed appropriate and valid for the aim the research. The data analysis tests the hypothesis of the research and creates new perspectives of the research topic to the researchers. (Aaltola & Valli 2001,136-138)

In content analyses the collected data will be gathering together in themes and this material will be reflected to theories. The researcher decides the themes and groups the answers according to their relevancy towards the research questions. (Wilkinson 2004, 183)

In this research according to content analyses method as a participant mentioned a certain word like "conflict" it was attached to a larger concept or theme like "teachers skills in conflict situation" which was then attached to a general theme/topic as "teacher's cultural competence in conflict situation".

With this analyzing method the collected data was analyzed. This process among quotations can be followed in chapter 4.

### 3.3 DATA COLLECTION

In this chapter I will present the method of data collection and the process of the data collection that provided the background material of my thesis.

The data collection proceeded in spring 2011 when I attended practical placement in project called “To care, to share, to dare.” This data collection was part of my practical placement. . The material collected permitted rights to be used in this research by Diaconia University of applied sciences. An idea was to present some results during the practical placement to the board of the project but due to some personal reasons that did not take a place.

#### 3.3.1 Focus group interview

The method I used for data collection was focus group interview. I chose this method based on the discussion with my thesis instructor and practical placement supervisor during the practical placement period in “To share, to care, to dare” – project. Another cause to utilize this method was consideration to receive material by collective brainstorming from experiences of students that would be as accurate as possible.

According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis in “Focus groups –strategic Articulations of Pedagogy, Politics, and Inquiry” the research method emerged during the Second World War by social scientist Paul Lazardfeld and Robert Merton. They used focus groups to study the media effects on the attitudes towards America’s participation in World war Two. Their efforts in research positioned focus group in qualitative research because the method collected data from the responses of participants in real time in face to face interaction. (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, 391) This method that used open-ended questions re-emerged in 1980’s by Merton at the use of marker research. Open-ended questions created an active discussion in data collection.

According to Morgan focus group is “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher.” The active

role of the researcher in creation of the group discussion and creating the interaction in discussion produces the data. (Morgan 1990,130) In this research the data production succeeded well and the discussion were profound and followed the interview structure and the topic. The challenge was with time limitation because the discussions could have lasted several hours. Therefore the role of the moderator was important and it was compulsory

The focus group interview can be utilized as a preliminary stage of large study to test the collection tool used in study or to accomplish deeper insight of possible qualitative research done or a self-contained method to receive perspectives from diverse groups or as an evaluation tool after a change. (Foster-Turner 2009, 213) The role of the method in this research is the self-contained method to receive the perspective of the international students on the cultural competence of teachers in University of applied sciences.

The advantages of this method as a research tool are in dynamics of group interaction that produces an insight to consensus and diverse of perspectives. The moderator has a possibility to clarify responses and create follow-up questions during the interview. The concepts and ideas of peoples thoughts and feeling and opinions of given topic can be discovered. (Foster-Turner 2009, 214) The topic of this research demanded recovery of the ideas and thoughts and feelings and opinions of the students to teachers and their actions.

The participants are not the representatives of the wider population and there for the results cannot be generalized. The challenge of the group interview is also in group dynamics there for there can be silent members in discussion and that can affect findings. (Morgan 1996, 140-141) The process of selecting the members for the group interviews and to find members that create productive group dynamics succeeded well. I benefited from the familiarity to students involving the topic and having an idea of how the interviewers act in a group. That knowledge abled me to create a functioning focus group.

To create a retentive focus group is challenging to conduct. The moderator needs to have previous experience of moderating and also possess rapport-building and facilitative skills. The researcher rehearsed this method in study

module RRP among other students and gained experience on the method. Both of the focus group interview sessions were moderated by the researcher. The role of the moderator is to direct the discussion and provide topics for the discussion.

An open discussion where the moderator by herself is an object of the research has more insight to understand the jargon and therefore guide the topics of the discussion and take a part to discussion as well.

The focus group interviews were transcribed word to word. Eventually from both interviews there were almost 3 hours of material for the process of transcription. The language and concepts used in discussions are familiar to the moderator and that is why the analyzing was easy to do according to answers because the communication and style of expressing matters is familiar to me from the experience of classroom.

Two focus group interviews were organized in February 2011. First interview was with 4 students and second interview with 3 students. The participants were selected from international students of study program. They were either 3rd, 4th or already graduated students at the time of the focus group interview sessions.

I chose the people to focus group interviews from same cultural background because that allows a common reflection on the topic. Focus groups were collected from the students sharing the same cultural background. Considering the topic of the focus group interview sessions it was important to have students that were already past the crises stage of cultural shock to be able to discuss on the topic without the effects of cultural shock.

Gathering of the focus groups became challenging when the participants were told that the session would be filmed. Belonging to the community and still having academic courses left some students decided not to participate in fear of the material or their identity to leak. Eventually I succeed to obtain trust of 7 students that volunteered to be part of the focus group interviews. I can assume that I benefited from the fact that I knew these participants personally. They

were able to discuss about this matter openly and allowed the film the session and trusted when told that the material will be handled confidentially. The participants who denied taking a part rationalized their decision by the possible effects to their academic careers and lacked the trust to confidentiality.

I made a decision that to obtain the discussion for material collection as open as possible the filming happened without showing faces of the participants on screen. The recognition for the group members on tape in the transcription process was made according to voice and body movement on tape.

### 3.3.2 Personal Narrative

Personal narrative in research appears challenging because the experience is personal and therefore has a subjective nature of someone's own ideas, renditions and visions of certain issues. Personal narrative not necessarily has a scientific value. The benefit of this narrative is the creation of an insight to the topic and possible production of a unique perspective. (Holliday 2007,132)

For the research the personal narrative was important because the research idea accelerated from personal experiences of the researcher and raised the interest towards cultural competence in education professions.



## 4. FINDINGS

This section consist the analysis of the data collected by the researcher. The data will be analyzed and attached to theoretical framework of the research. Transcribed interviews are quoted in this part and separated from analysis by indentation. Quotes are produced by the participants in focus group interviews not the researcher. As mentioned before the participants in focus groups shared same cultural background and same gender the therefore findings not necessarily apply to all the students in international study program and specially not the students with Finnish background.

### 4.1 CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN PRACTISE OF TEACHERS

International students face an unfamiliar environment at the beginning of their studies. Some of them have never been away from family, relatives or even community they have lived in. The concepts of culture and identity of students participating research were vulnerable and subject to influence and change. Previous experience of students from academic institutions guides the expectations of actions and interaction of teachers.

A student had a different experience of teachers back in student's home country: *"...Teachers are seen as deposits of knowledge. Students need to seek knowledge from them. So I would say it is quite patriarchal and hierarchal order. They are the top most author and the students are at the bottom."*

*"The teachers in our university of applied sciences they liberal in the sense of the way they practice the power with their students. Frankly speaking I did not find them to have any authority from the teachers. I think they were quite loose in sense of authority."*

*"... And I find that teachers were clearly lacking the skills and methods how to teach and share the knowledge they have."*

Several students in study program already have accomplished a degree in higher education institution. Their skills and expectations of actions of teachers in higher education have been shaped by previous experiences.

#### 4.1.1 Description of cultural competence by Metsänen

The table created and presented by Metsänen that was introduced in chapter 2 shows main characters to cultural competence in practice. In this section I will attach the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and qualities to comments from focus group interviews.

<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>SKILLS</b>	<b>ATTITUDES &amp; QUALITIES</b>
Cultural differences.	Flexible pedagogical skills.	Self-awareness on effects of own culture.
Background information on students.	Planning curriculum for heterogeneous group.	Equality
Situation in country of origin. (political, historical)	Different teaching methods.	Tolerate stress and conflicts
Idea of studying and study culture	Different interaction and communication skills	Tolerance towards cultures and flexibility.
Recognition of cultural shock *	Conflict solving	Sense of humor
Prejudice in learning process	Interaction in unpredicted situations	Tolerance to cope with uncertain situations
Process of acculturation	Interaction with different people	Tolerance to function in unpredicted situations
Different interaction and communication methods	High language skills (English)	Facing people without prejudice

Source: Metsänen (2011, 57-58; translated from Finnish to English by Anne Soininen. \*Changed by author.)

According to comments on the knowledge of cultural differences, ideas of studying and study culture and different interaction and communication methods teachers lack professional skills.

*“I think there has been lack of understanding culture many times. It is not just teachers but it is also students like coming late to class because they have different ideas of time and keep in time.”*

The knowledge on background information, recognition of cultural shock, process of acculturation and prejudice in learning process has been according to interviews sufficient but the comments show that sometimes teachers are too understanding towards cultural differences.

*“...Many students were not punctual or never came to class in time and teachers never did anything to that. I think they were just thinking that if student come from culture were punctuality is not important.”*

The knowledge on students' backgrounds and/or situation in students' country of origins did not clearly rise from focus group discussion but can be assumed that it would be impossible for a teacher to have specific experience and knowledge on 20 different countries. Clearly this matter is not the main issue in international class and students do not expect that from teachers.

During the discussion the students were introduced the concept of cultural shock and the symptoms of it to help them to identify them. All the participants admitted to experience cultural shock in some level. According to student recognition on cultural shock and symptoms of it were not either recognized by teachers or teachers did not pay attention to that matter.

*“To be honest I cannot remember that teachers identified that at all. I cannot remember that...”*

The section describing necessary skills for teacher to guard mainly got negative comments during the data collection. Student did not feel that teachers have flexible pedagogical skills, different teaching methods or interaction and communication skills. The interaction skills face contradictory opinions. Some students felt that teachers were generally friendly and respectful and treated

students with humility, openness and modesty. But others commented that teachers lacked authority during lectures and with authority and power they could have influenced the study environment.

*“...if the teachers would have had more authority and teachers would have practiced more power the environment and the whole pedagogy for teaching would have been better.”*

Conflict solving and interaction skills in unpredicted situations according to discussions were low. The conflict situations during the lectures happened often and mainly between students disagreeing with each other's or students disagreeing with teachers.

*“... Teachers lack to competence to these situations. I remember one teacher when students got angry would get angry as well and that is something that we do not perceive from a good teacher. There are better ways to handle it and there are better ways to deal with a conflict in classroom.”*

Another comment from students shows that conflict situations and interaction skills in unpredicted situations were lacking.

*“...sometimes I felt that some teachers did not even realize that there was a conflict in classroom. One teacher we had was so reserved that the conflict in classroom never had solution.”*

In the international study program the students in this research are participating has no teachers from originally English speaking countries. The language skills therefore were described median. Considering the fact that either most of the students have English as their native language the English language skills of teachers are hard to evaluate.

The strength of teachers according to collected data is in attitudes and qualities. The teachers were described practicing equality, tolerance towards different cultures in equal manner and facing students without prejudice. Students felt that there is equality between genders as well.

*“..I think the teachers have some experience already about different cultures. And I think that students have been treated equally no matter of their country of origin and I felt that teachers have at least some cultural understanding that when we have an argument it does not mean that we are fighting. It is just an argument.”*

It is important to remember that obtaining high cultural competence also requires successful utilization of the skill among the multicultural environment. (O’Hagan 2001, 235)

#### 4.2 TOWARDS CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Culturally competent professional teaching requires efforts and interest of the practitioner to increase the personal cultural competence. Leavitt presents four steps towards culturally competent practice.

He uses an example of a physical therapist but according to reaches results these steps can be adapt to teachers as well. Several comments show that either all or some of these steps are lacking or presented weakly in the academic environment of students participating the

*“I think the teachers have some experience already about different cultures. And I think that students have been treated equally no matter of their country of origin.”*

First he emphasizes the importance to acknowledge the eternal effect of culture in someone’s life. He states that people are grown into their own cultures and have adapted beliefs; attitudes and behavior by their surroundings and easily according to human nature guard their own culture as a norm that is the ultimate standard.

*“...When there have been gender issues they have seemed to understand where the students are coming. And I think they are able to understand why there are conflicts in classroom and they understand that some students express themselves vocally strong but it does not mean that there is a conflict going on.”*

*“This might sound really negative but I think I need to be honest and say that teachers lack to competence to these situations. I remember one teacher when students got angry would get angry as well and that is something that we do not perceive from a good teacher. There are better ways to handle it and there are better ways to deal with a conflict in classroom.”*

Second step towards culturally competent practice is to appraise cross-cultural affinity and stay alert of the dynamics cultural differences can create. In cross cultural communication errors of other persons aims and operations are possible. Communication styles and personal characters and experience bring challenges to follow multicultural interaction. These challenges can be faced with focusing on improving communication skills and increasing thoughtfulness to minimizing the misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misjudgment.

My personal experience as being part of the international study community remembers several occasions where the following step was not considered. Mainly classroom situations escalating from cross cultural miscommunication were also disturbing the actual structure of lectures. Teachers’ capability to react and solve these situations according to focus group interviews and my personal experience has been weak. According to Leavitt with more insight into students cultures and perspectives would bring ability to develop mutually beneficial interactions.

Third step to improve cultural competence in professional practice is to develop cultural awareness and reflect that knowledge into everyday practice. Leavitt proves how the context of active reflection with client in physical therapeutic practice might effect to clients experience of treatment session. Effective interaction with students from other backgrounds and genuine interest towards their culture of origin by showing willingness to hear about their cultures expands the cultural knowledge.

*“I think that international students are not just median students. A lot of them have already been married they have had good lives and careers in their home countries and they have a lot of knowledge about the issues and they have job experience from the field from their own countries. And when there is criticism*

*towards teachers or Finnish students it comes from the past experience and the academic ideas they might have or criticism towards the University of Applied Sciences is not respected as much as they could have been.”*

The curriculum of study program students is participating and the materials of lectures focus on human rights, global issues, international crises, challenges in development world and social exclusion and oppression.

*“I think that many students have felt insulted. Many case studies presented in classroom and material focuses on real events of developing world. Many of the students come from those situations or from the regions presented and have seen all those things and experts of their own situation. Sometimes when the students try to reflect on those situations and share their experience and they have emotions involved. At that situation teachers shouldn’t focus on timetable or relevancy of the topic. They need to listen and let the student complete.”*

Even the cultural background of student is familiar to teacher certain situations demanding discussion and reflect the personal experiences are important for students. The professional competence of teachers requires following the curriculum and they have the responsibly the proceed lectures and keep time. In study program with the fourth step is the final adaption to diversity and multicultural classroom environment. Teachers are expected to use methods and develop practice that is culturally competent.

*“The teachers in XXX they are liberal in the sense of the way they practice the power with their students. Frankly speaking I did not find them to have any authority from the teachers. I think they were quite loose in sense of authority.*

The concepts of culture and identity of students participating research were vulnerable and subject to influence and change. Also among young students the general growth as a person happens while studying. The lack of guidance in life rose from the discussion..

## 5. CONCLUSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

In chapter 4 different theories of cultural competence and data collected were connected and the discussion between them. In this chapter conclusions according to previous content analyses will be presented.

### 5.1 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The role of the teachers and other professions vary between cultures. It can be stated that the role of teachers change among the cultures. Participants in research had different experience of teachers. Their own cultural concept of professionals in education stated them as guiders and adults referred to parents. The actual support offered by guidance counselors and campus priest necessarily do not catch the students that have no prior experience of an education institution offering support services by other than actual teachers felt it hard to use these services.

Therefore the personal relationships and competence of teachers to develop less professional relationship to you international students are needed and wished for. Several comments during data collection explained to loneliness and need for parental like supervision from the teachers involving with the students.

The concept of cultural shock was explained to participants of focus group discussions. According to discussion they identified symptoms of rejection of new environment and idolizing the original environment. Students identified changes in nutrition consumption and melancholia. Several of them remember having anger blasts over minor issues. Some of the anger blasts occurred in education environment.

The importance is to understand the cultural superego and also the relevance of previous experience of student's behavior in classroom situations.

In prevention of marginalization of students in university of applied sciences to focus on international students should be on effects of cultural shock and the marginalization elaborating from cultural difference. Appreciating ethnicity without prejudice in equality is a great beginning.



The lack of general framework and principles for professional work in Universities of applied science is a dilemma. Some institutions have their own principles that teachers are assumed to be following in their practice. According to study these principles are either incomplete or they are not followed. Also the ethical guidelines of teachers' trade union do not really face the challenges international classes produce.

Another conclusion according to analyses is that international students need and expect more support in their everyday life outside the study environment. Young international students without prior experience of living abroad seem to be in the most vulnerable situation. The prevention for their marginalization at this point is clearly in hands of the faculty of their own institute and mostly the teachers. Their cultural competence in order to recognize the cultural shock is the most important factor. The support and encouragement are needed in studies and also in learning of the Finnish language.

## 5.2 CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness is mentioned in all the theories of obtaining cultural competence presented in chapter 2. These theories emphasizes on the importance of cultural awareness being one of the fundamental steps towards cultural competence.

The context of community development and case studies utilized in lectures are close to several personal experiences international students have faced in their lifespan. From the discussions rose a fact that in several occasions' students felt that teachers did not let them talk about their own experience. A possibility that teachers lacked the cultural knowledge and awareness and did not understand that despair the students' young age they could have enormous life experience. The respect for the student's knowhow and experience clearly lacked.

The situations in classroom were the lack of interaction skills or cultural awareness produces conflicts. These conflicts have been felt stressing among the students and sometimes they could have lasted even over a semester.

Reacting to these conflicts in proper manner would ease students' life and general atmosphere during the lectures and also the general atmosphere in the study community. Supporting students' self-awareness and their cultural identity in certain level as well avoiding stereotyping of student by their cultural background can create different atmosphere and either prevent or clear conflict situations. The lack of cultural awareness and the ethno history can be identified as one of the largest lacks in the study environment of the students' participating this study.

### 5.3 USE OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Using content analysis as method to analyze the data was interesting and challenging as it was my first time to use that method. To use the method to attach comments from the discussion to actually theory and then to make conclusions out of them was an interesting process. Using this method in this research the study can conclude some of the research questions presented in the beginning. The cultural competence of the teachers seems to affect the students and their general wellbeing in some extends in University of Applied sciences. Nevertheless, the personal narrative of the researcher is in there. My personal experience of the cultural competence has a negative nature and that affected the analysis process. Therefore it can be stated that the conclusions of this study can be vaguely prejudiced. The conclusions found are not surprising but they were more complex than presumed. Hence, the content analysis met the research questions of the research well and was the most relevant method for this research.

## 6. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I did not choose this topic to create havoc or criticize the work of professionals involved in research. I chose this topic to rise and document issues effecting international students and search possible reasons and answers for the oppression and social exclusion some of them are lead. My personal motivation consist from the appreciation of the experiences shared during these past 4 years in environment that formed from multicultural interactions and elevated an pure interest towards the concept of cultural competence in professional use.

The issues in multicultural study program are hard to predict and clearly issues that are not predicted cannot be prevented. With documentation and research on issues that are faced in international study program and touch challenges that international students experience possible better preparations can be succeeded.

In multiple occasions international students turned towards originally Finnish students with matters that they worried or they were confused about and were unable to discuss with professionals offered by school. The confusion and effects of cultural shock among international students affected the general atmosphere during the lectures and field visits.

As the research is done by originally Finnish female student from international degree program the objectivity on the issues of international students is thin but that brings unique insight to the topics. Still the main research topic stays objective as the lack of cultural competence personally did not affect the researcher. Only the situations escalating in lectures from lack of cultural competence were unpleasant experiences but good practice for the future in multicultural and heterogeneous social work field.

## 7. REFERENCES:

- Aaltola, Juhani & Valli, Raine. 2001. Ikkunoita Tutkimusmetodeihin I-II. Eskola, Jari. Laadullisen tutkimuksen Juhannustaiat – Laadullisen aineiston analyysi vaihe vaiheelta. Jyväskylä: Pj-kustannus.
- Baldwin, Elaine & Longhurst, Brian & McCracken, Scott & Ogborn, Miles & Smith, Greg. Introducing Cultural studies.1999.Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna S.2008. Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. Third edition. California: Sage Publications.
- Foster-Turner, Julia. 2009 Research methods for health and social care, London: Palgrave
- Haralambos & Holborn. 2008. Sociology Themes and Perspectives. Seventh edition. London: Collins.
- Holliday, Adrian 2007. Doing and writing qualitative research. Second edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Leavitt,Ronnie.2010. Cultural Competence A lifelong journey to Cultural Profience. New Jersey: SLACK incorporated.
- Metsänen, Riikka. 2011. Kun lokaali ja globaali kohtaavat opetustilanteessa, mitä ammatillisen opettajan tulisi osata. Teoksessa Metsänen, R. & Matinheikki-Kokko, K. (toim.) Lokaaleja ja globaaleja kohtaamisia sosiaali- ja terveysalalla. Hämeenlinna: HAMK
- Metsänen, Riikka & Kämäräinen Anne. Ammatillisen opettajan monikulttuurinen osaaminen. Accessed : 23.4.2012.  
[http://pro.phkk.fi/kit/articles%5CMetsanen\\_article.pdf](http://pro.phkk.fi/kit/articles%5CMetsanen_article.pdf)
- Morgan,L, David.1996.Annual review of Sociology.Vol 22. Accessed: 2.2.2011 and 24.3.2012. [http://digitalvillage.org.uk/docs/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/morgan\\_d\\_l\\_1996\\_focus\\_groups\\_annual\\_review\\_of\\_sociology.pdf](http://digitalvillage.org.uk/docs/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/morgan_d_l_1996_focus_groups_annual_review_of_sociology.pdf)

Oberg,K.1960. Cultural shock: Adjustment to New cultural environments. Practical Anthropology 7. New York: Practical Anthropology.

O`Hagan, Kieran.2001.Cultural competence in the caring professions. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö OAJ. Ammattietiikka. Accessed: 25.3.2012.  
[http://www.oaj.fi/portal/page?\\_pageid=515,447767&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://www.oaj.fi/portal/page?_pageid=515,447767&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

Papadopoulos, Irena. 2006. Transcultural Health and social care –Development of culturally competent practitioners. London: Elsevier.

Sam,L,David.2006. Acculturation : Conceptual Background and Core Components. In Sam,L,David& Berry,W, John.2006. The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge university press

Soininen, Anne. 2011. Project Plan. SCI study module. Diaconia University of applied sciences.

Study in Finland. Study options, Bachelor's program. Accessed: 31.3.2012  
[http://www.studyinfinland.fi/study\\_options/degree\\_programmes/bachelors\\_programmes](http://www.studyinfinland.fi/study_options/degree_programmes/bachelors_programmes)

Wilkinson, Sue.2004. Focus group research. In Silverman,David.2004. Qualitative Research : Theory, method and practice. Second edition.London: SAGE publications

## APPENTIX 1: Interview structure for Focus group interviews

### **1. The role of professors/teachers in own culture.**

- Differences compared to teachers in DIAK.
- Positive/negative experiences.
- What are the main qualities of a good teacher.

### **2. Conflicts with teachers and their professional competence.**

- Expectations of teachers/experiences of teachers' actions.
- Teachers skills to deal with stress and challenges in classroom situations.
- Ability to form personal relationships. Are they necessary?
- Positive/negative experiences of professional competence.

### **3. Cultural competence of teachers.**

- Awareness of cultures and their affection on class room situations.
- Cultural knowledge of student's behavior in classroom and students approach to education/teachers in general.
- Cultural sensitivity of teachers. Teacher/student communication, trust/respect of students' culture, accepting their culture.
- Cultural competence of teachers. Skills teaching multicultural class, skills dealing with cultural conflicts in during teaching. Discrimination?

### **4. Understanding students' background.**

- Understanding different religious backgrounds.
- Understanding gender issues