



# Making the most of multicultural classrooms

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**1. Current situation**  
internationality at  
Aalto



**2. Integration**  
what should we pay  
attention to?



**3. Discussion**  
questions and ideas  
to share

**Questions? Get in touch!**

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# Aalto is the 37th most international university in the world.

Times Higher Education 2020

- **26%** of Aalto students are international students
- The number has steadily grown in the past 10 years, a slight drop in 2017
- International Student Barometer (2017): challenges mainly related to **lack of peer support, networks** and career information, also **prejudice** and **navigating in the Finnish system**

# But what does "most international" mean?

- yes, we have degree programmes in English and an increased number of international students in the statistics – **but does that mean quality internationalization?**
- meaningful strategies for being truly international – **a call for quality integration and interactions** that benefit both international and domestic students

# Quality integration and interaction?

- **acknowledging** that an international university also means **an increase in different experiences, languages, worldviews and cultures** (in addition to nationalities)
- **acknowledging** the language that we use and the groups and categories that it creates – who is us and who is them; do we talk about developing the cultural skills of **the whole community**?
- **acknowledging** that integration is more than translating – it is also about **administrative, cultural and deeper linguistic perspectives**, mutual learning and inclusion



## Administrative perspectives

- **residence permit requirements, tuition fees** and their consequences – what kind of different paths and inequalities they create between student groups?
- on average, international students perform better in their studies than domestic students both in terms of credits and grade – but after introducing tuition fees, feelings of loneliness and pressure seem to have increased among international students (AllWell? 2018, 2019)

# Linguistic perspectives

- **dealing with expectations** related to working in a specific language or languages – does internationality automatically mean an all-English policy, or could we together discuss and agree on multilingual ways of communicating and working?
- inclusivity doesn't happen only by translating, but also **explaining ways of working and concepts that might seem straight-forward** to you (e.g. group work, independent thinking) - dealing with rules and expectations around concepts and learning methods





## Cultural perspectives

- **diversity concerns the whole community and each one of its members:** gaining global competences (...different perspectives, effective communication strategies, global ethics, systems thinking) is for everyone
- **recognizing unconscious bias** and being aware of the limited generality of our own opinions, beliefs, attributes and behaviors
- **appreciating** that every society is as complex and as culturally varied as our own – **making use of diversity**



# Summing up: recognizing diversity, recognizing need for guidance

- Multicultural classrooms are essential in **all degrees** and great for gaining intercultural communication skills and global competences, but **instructions and guidance are essential** – at best rewarding, at worst foster negative stereotyping and lead to conflict and avoidance
  1. Providing **context-specific** information and support - **communicating pedagogical goals**
  2. **Respecting** and adjusting for **diversity**
  3. **Adapting, being flexible** and responsive to evidence
  4. Preparing students for life in a globally connected world – **including perspectives and examples from other cultures**

(Betty Leask (2015): Internationalizing of the Curriculum)

# Summing up: facilitating multicultural group work

Don't stop at just mixing the groups but **communicate the reason for mixing as well – why is this important?**

1. **explaining the challenges** that might arise and letting students discuss them
2. facilitating **ice-breaking**, discussing **rules and perceptions of group work**
3. designing the tasks so that students **really need to work as a group**, not just divide the tasks and meet for presentation
4. designing the tasks so that students need to **make use of the diverse perspectives and cultural capital in the group**
5. asking students to reflect on what they learned from working in a multicultural group – integrated into learning goals of courses and degrees

(based on student feedback from workshops)

# Summing up: questions for discussion!

## Questions for us? Questions for you:

1. Do you recognize the different challenges and integration perspectives presented?
2. How does your course develop the global competences of students? Do you talk about internationality in the class? What have you learned from your own discipline from students from other cultures?
3. Experiences on multicultural group work – do you encourage or force making multicultural groups? How do you communicate the tasks and the reason for group working?
4. Multicultural pedagogy skills are not mandatory – should they be? How could all teachers be more aware of these topics?