PROCEEDINGS OF THE 14th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Tuesday, 12th & Wednesday, 13th July, 2016

Theme: The Role of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Sustainable Development

Held at African Union Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Responsible leadership for learning in an international Master's degree program by Prof Lea Kuusilehto-Awale[1][23] University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

Abstract

This presentation is based on a qualitative research conducted on an international two-year Master's degree program of Educational Leadership launched in Finland in 2007 as the first Master's degree level program of educational leadership, management or administration in the country. This novelty led to the decision of conducting a research into the program.

The program was launched in the separate Institute of Educational Leadership of the Faculty of Education of the University of Jyväskylä as a ministry funded experiment, and was accepted as part of the Faculty's regular teaching program in 2009.

The research problem was to find out what kind of learning would take place in a program with international students run in the rather monocultural context of Finland. The research method was mainly ethnography, consisting of the researcher's observation, participation and interaction with the students and staffs of the program as well as the university administration, as the researcher's job description varied in the roles of researcher, academic advisor, lecturer and program director. The ethnographic approach was amended by initial surveys and semi-structured interviews conducted with the first two cohorts. The first stage of the research covered the years 2007-2009, and the second stage the years 2010-2014, when the research approach was purely ethnographic. The results of this presentation come from the first two years of the research and are a sample of findings from the ethnographic data. The theoretical approach is from the areas of ethical and collaborative learning and leadership as well as learning communities' theory, derived from the foundations of the program curriculum.

The way to run the program in our vision of the curriculum was responsible leadership with an ethic of care and caring, meaning that we believed in the focus having to be responsiveness to a student's needs in both study and life far away from home. We set the objective to be learning to learn in interaction between teachers and students, students with their peers, teachers with their peers. We wrote the concept of the human being, knowledge and learning that we believed in and wanted to exercise it with a humanistic-socio-constructivist approach. These are the premises we had developed in our democratic society with human rights, rule of law, equity and equality (also in education), and they were the foundation of our pedagogy in conveying the curriculum content.

Little did we know or understand that 80% of our students would come from autocratic or dictatorial societies, in 2007-2009 from 10 countries, by 2014 from over 30 countries across the globe, where our attributes had not been experienced by our students. On top of this difference came the interculturally diverse behaviours.

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The students came with an extremely high motivation level to complete the programme and belief in their study skills. The challenges that had to be solved comprised the students' expectation of top down managerial approach to leadership, their pedagogic experience of learning behavioristically through order - response and rote learning, or simply copying and repeating as well as writing book exams, intercultural behavior codes found unacceptable and leading to interpersonal conflicts, general study skills, academic writing and presentation skills, learning about oneself in relation to diverse peer students and the ensuing emotional turmoil, and how to cope in home context with one's belief in the new learning concepts and contents. Similarly, each point was a learning challenge to the teachers. What held this moving train on track was the responsible leadership approach where every student's needs are attended to in a timely manner in a mutually accepted mode of interaction. Such interaction succeeded to be sustainably available, caring and respectful on both sides.

Key words: international education, international student, ethical leadership, collaborative leadership, learning community, intercultural learning

Introduction

Before the 1980s the internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) in Finland relied mainly on bilateral agreements between national governments, and the geographical reach was Europe-centred. The next stage began in the late 1980s. The first steps included building both faculties' and students' capacity through teacher, expert, researcher, student and trainee exchange programmes. The majority of the exchanges were realized with the Nordic countries and in the framework of the European Union after Finland became a member state in 1995. Importance was placed also on increasing teaching in foreign languages, especially in English on all education levels. (Garam, 2009)

Finland is also a member of the OECD, aligning her governance to its objectives. The OECD in its 2008 survey *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society* focused on the need for internationalisation, recommending that internationalisation strategies in line with the national needs should be developed, to enhance harmonisation of cross-border quality and comparability of tertiary education. In that survey national internationalisation strategies were defined as one of the key challenges of higher education, consisting of building the strategy, the policy framework, improving the coordination of national policy, transforming teacher education establishments into proactive internationalisation agents, creating structures, and impacting on on-campus internationalisation.

Consequently, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in its *Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009-2015* (2009: 12) set an objective to raise the number of exchanges and non-Finnish students in higher education considerably, which currently is still below the OECD average of 6,9% of HE students. The number of incoming degree students compared to the total number of students in higher education had risen from 2,9 % (8955) in the year 2005 to 6,5 % (20255) in the year 2014,

whereas the number of incoming exchange students with varying periods was in 2005 2,5 % (7697) and 3,2 % (9936) in 2014 (CIMO.fi, 2014).

The Finnish academic universities and the universities of applied sciences began offering international undergraduate and graduate programmes about twenty years ago, the academic universities focusing on Master's and those of applied sciences on Bachelor's degrees. At the same time, internationalisation as well as provision and development of international degree programmes has gained visibility in the strategies of the higher education institutions, being today one of the strategic cornerstones of developing HE. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010; Garam, 2009) The response to this provision has been enhanced by the global visibility of the quality of Finnish basic education in the wake of Finland's first class success in the PISA assessments of the OECD in 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009 (OECD, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010). The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council conducted the first evaluation of the international degree programmes in 1999, the second in 2005, and the third one in 2012. In 2012 the number of international English-taught degree programmes had risen to 399 in Finland, the highest peak of establishing new ones being 2007-2008 (The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council 2:2013), when also the focus programme of this study was launched.

The five objectives set in the *Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2009:12) are "a genuinely international higher education community, increasing the quality and attractiveness of higher education institutions, promoting the export of expertise, supporting a multicultural society, and promoting global responsibility". The rationale is that the appeal of Finland shall be boosted as a business, work and living environment, in which internationalisation is at the core: "Moreover, internationalisation of higher education institutions promotes diversity in the society and business community, international networking, competitiveness and innovativeness, as well as improves the well-being, competence and education of the citizens." (pp. 9-11) The strategy echoes the recommendations of the OECD survey from 2008 introduced above.

The strategy was created at a time when in Finnish education policy discourse the objectives of education began to be reframed as objectives for competitiveness instead of the earlier, more holistic ones for human growth, community service, citizenship and transfer of civilization (Bildung). The strategies do not address definitions of internationalisation or what internationalisation implies in human behaviours, interactions and governance systems or what challenges it poses to national, regional and local governance and leadership.

International degree programmes have been exempt of semester fees but in January 2016 an act of law came into force which mandates semester fees to students from non-EU and EFTA countries as of autumn 2017 at the latest, but also mandating the universities to create a grant system towards covering part of the fees. The range of yearly fees is currently between ca. 8000 and 20 000 EUR.

Master's Degree Programme of Educational Leadership

Since 2007 the Institute of Educational Leadership at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland has offered an international two-year Master's Degree Program in Educational Leadership (MPEL) of 120 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System, 1 ECTS being 27 hours of full time study). In the early 2000s the aim of the Institute had been to launch a Finnish language Master's degree program, which the Ministry of Education had declined. Yet, with the demand on internationalising higher education, the permission to commence an English taught international program was granted as a two-year experiment from 2007 to 2009, and the program was accredited in the act on international degrees. After the experimental period the program was established as a regular degree program of the Faculty of Education. To date this is the only Master's degree program in the field of educational leadership, management and administration in Finland. I worked in the program from August 2007 till the end of 2014.

The application process is global, and the yield in 2007-2009 was a student body from 10 countries representing all continents, rising to over 30 countries by 2014. The gender balance has been rather equal. The overwhelming majority of the students are foreigners, the diversity of the countries varying from cohort to cohort. The pool of applicants has been around 50-60 on each application round, and the yearly intake is twenty students. Yet, the actual number of students arriving on campus varies annually. In 2007 fifteen arrived, in 2008 fourteen. Compared to international degree programmes in Finland on average, the outcome 2007-2014 was a high retention and graduation rate. Yet, the variation in graduation time ranged from 1 year and 9 months to 5 years. The backgrounds to this variation are highly individual.

In 2007-2009 the human resource in the program consisted of a 20% professorship from the USA, a full time researcher turned into also a program director, academic advisor and lecturer, and a part time secretary since 2008. Teaching was taken care of by the professor, the researcher, the director of the Institute, and hourly paid lecturers from the University departments and practising principals as well as professor visits from Norway and South Africa. It must be noted that all the Finnish teaching faculties of the Institute multitasked also in its Finnish programmes or researches. In 2007-2009 Master's thesis advising was conducted as group work with a PhD degree holder as the first advisor, and the second advisor with either a PhD or a Master's degree.

As in Finland equal access to education is a constitutional human right regardless of gender, health, socio-economic background, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or age, education was exempt of fees also in tertiary education, including the foreign students. So, the foreign degree students studied in Finland as a courtesy of the Finnish taxpayers, and consequently there were very few scholarships available. As mentioned above, this courtesy is being changed into a fee based system as of autumn 2017. By that time the students have had to cover only their living expenses, 6000-6500 EUR per year. Related to completion of the 120 ECTS of study in two years, the students had to complete 30 ECTS per semester, i.e. 60 ECTS per academic year to have their residence permits renewed for the second year. As legislatively the Master's degree programmes are two-year programmes, the program instruction must be delivered in two years. For a well-grounded reason, the student may be able to extend his/her student registration status for a maximum of two more years.

The curriculum was developed in 2005-2007 from the basis of the advanced studies in educational leadership provided in the Institute in Finnish. The underlying humanistic concept of the human being and the socio-constructivist concept of knowledge construction and learning as well as our belief that both student and teacher would be learners in the program were the premises we relied on as ours is a democratic society with human rights, rule of law, equity and equality also in education. They were the societal foundation of our pedagogy in conveying the curriculum content. We genuinely departed from the acknowledgement that this was what we have and understand, where the curriculum came from and that we wanted to place its contents and connection to its society into discourse with the students' environments in a collaborative learning culture on campus.

Problem statement, research design and methodology

The program being new and unique in the Finnish higher education context, the decision was made in spring 2007 to conduct research on it. From the time the curriculum was created between 2005-2007, the focus in program delivery was not only on teaching but on learning, as voiced in the curriculum text (MPEL curriculum 2007-2009, p. 7): The guiding principle of our work and of the means by which it is implemented is the respect for the worth, integrity and equality of every human being also in their role as learners, and the conviction that learning is a mutual process. The faculties in their role as providers of education are also learners. Through shared learning we believe in our value basis deepening and radiating via the future experiences of our students.

From this approach followed that the research in 2007-2009 aimed to find out and define a holistic overview into what happened in students' and teachers' learning in this program and how it would best be led to enhance students to be successful. Success was defined as low dropout rate, high graduation rate and employability after it. In other words, the purpose was to capture and define as we then said at the Institute, "the soul of the program". In 2007 the research problem came to be formulated as follows: What are the learning processes, their implementation and effectiveness like in the experience of the students and the teachers?

To the above effect, the following research questions were formed:

1. What are the students' experiences concerning motivation, objective of study, formation of professional identity, meaningfulness of the cultural context of the study, intercultural interaction between students, and students and teachers, learning culturally from the environment, from one's cohort and from one's teachers?

2. What are the corresponding experiences of the teachers?

3. How do the two parties experience the meaningfulness and relevance of the curriculum, the program structure and the methodology?

Research framework and method

This study was qualitative and it was conducted using the ethnographic method, in order to capture the unimaginable as the program was new in Finland: the nuances, versatility, explicit, hidden and tacit constructs of the students' and teachers' realities. The data collection was intended to consist of surveys, observation, participant observation, and interviews.

The intended research design could not be followed as the researcher's work contract changed after the first four months to include also partly directing the program, academic advising and lecturing, which became a permanent arrangement a year later in 2008. The research was initially planned to cover autumn 2007 to the end of autumn 2008, and to consist of (1) the initial surveys to the first two cohorts of 2007 and 2008 at the beginning of their first and second academic years, (2) student interviews in the beginning of their first and second academic years, as well as staff interviews, and of (3) ethnographic observation. The initial interviews were conducted with the 1st and 2nd cohorts in autumn 2007 and 2008, and a repeat interview with the 1st cohort in autumn 2008, altogether three rounds instead of the planned four.

Some staffs were interviewed. The ethnographic observation and analysis cycle soon led into making also recordings of some school visits and research seminars, the sum total being ca. 90 hours. The other major data retrieval was ethnographic observation both participative and non-participative, and note taking. The ethnographic data consist of an observation memo of 80 typed A 4 pages, 10 notebooks, the calendars, and documents from running the program, emails, and follow-up data.

The observation was both enriched and facilitated by the fact that with the campus program starting, the production of an e-learning program was launched, video-recording all the lectures. This leg continued from autumn 2007 till end of autumn 2008, and from then on part time. My multiple work role opened a new level of depth into the research in terms of access to planning, administrative and pedagogical issues as well as the context of the international programmes in this particular university and in Finnish higher education in general that I had barely had access to in the first months as a researcher. But, on the other hand, the systematic data retrieval in the form of regular, planned interviews with staffs and regular observation periods had to be cancelled, as explained above.

This research report presents a sample of the findings to research question one from the ethnographic observation data.

Ethnography as a research method

The ethnographic method is a qualitative research method, which does not predefine, hypothesise or pre-structure the research in advance, but it is during the research process that the direction and focus unfold. The objective is to penetrate inside the object of focus, to swim inside the otherness, to get to know it personally, learning and understanding the meaning behind the action. An ethnographer interprets or translates the perceived into meanings, on which the described system is based, as well as the sense, mind or goals of people's actions. (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998)

Ethnography focuses on cultural systems of communities. Data are gathered in fieldwork in natural circumstances through observation and/or participant observation taking notes, writing a diary, and also by interviews, discussions and studying documents. In ethnography the most pertinent instrument in data retrieval and interpretation is the ethnographer and his/her ability and sensitivity to perceive the relevant, to understand, to interpret, to distance him/herself to adopt the view of the informant, which is the basis of the interpretation.

The researcher's sensitivity and perceptivity including the ability to assess and reassess his/her understanding in order for it to grow in the long research process are of essential importance. (Atkinson, 1992) Similarly, Hakala and Hynninen (2007) and Salo (2007) describe that literally speaking, ethnography means writing about cultures even if today's technologies enable also other forms of presenting findings. We transform what we observe, perceive, find, through thinking into knowing and knowledge, which we convey in a language that can be shared: either as a text, or a visual and audio image. The thinking on which knowing is grounded forms in the "simultaneity, intertwining and constant movement" between the life of the community under study and the researcher observing and/or participating in it.

In ethnography, more attention is paid to getting to the field than in qualitative research on average, as each research stage shapes the conceptualization capacity of the ethnographer, the major research instrument (Atkinson, 1992). Eskola & Suoranta (2008) emphasise the particular importance of the informants' positive attitude to the research as the researcher is a long time participant in the field. This research started unfolding at the end of the last day of the first application interviews in spring 2007. I was a member of the interviewing committee of three. When the final interview was over, the director of the Institute and myself looked at each other, with our utterances overlapping, "This needs to be researched. This is a unique opportunity to research what happens in an international degree program of educational leadership in Finland." In the ensuing process, I was elected researcher into the program. The first and second cohort students were informed about the research prior to their arrival to campus, then jointly on campus, after which they were asked to sign formal research permits. They had the genuine right to refuse the permit, but only one student in the course of the entire research process refused the permit for the ethnographic observation. As a researcher, I felt at ease and trusted at all times in the interaction with the students; with some teachers the situation was more complex. A prologue to the above is the fact that I had been invited in 2005 to develop the program curriculum, and had been studying and teaching part time and tutoring in the Institute since autumn 2002.

How does one become an ethnographer? Ethnographic research is a journey into the informants' otherness. Inevitably, the interaction between the informants' otherness and that of the ethnographer's transforms the ethnographer's self-awareness and worldview. In ethnography, the transformation of the researcher's worldview has a poignant significance to the ethnographer's capacity to interact and to interpret the observations into meanings about the otherness. (Atkinson, 1992; Eskola & Suoranta (2008) Even before the commencement of my multiple role in the program, the question how much of an outsider or an insider can a researcher "living in the community" remain or become, became a point of deliberation.

What is also characteristic of ethnographic research is that the data analysis takes place constantly while the research process unfolds: It is not possible to switch off the researcher's mind from drawing conclusions while observing the life in the research community. But, in research on multicultural (multi-ethnic) communities it is wise to refrain from taking the initial conclusions at the face value, but only as a first stage of meaning building. Over time, and with the repeated exposures to the research community, the researcher's capacity for details and nuances grows, after which new layers of understanding emerge. The process could be described by the metaphor of peeling an onion layer by layer, or growing a plant: to grow the plant needs repeated times of watering, fertilising and pruning (layers of understanding) to render a blossoming plant of full growth (understanding identifiable by both informant and researcher). (Atkinson, 1992; Geertz, 1988)

The data analysis begins at an early stage when the researcher gains access to the community. The observation, the exposure to the research community, and the interaction with the informants trigger the beginning of the analysis. The analysis may not be intended and planned, but it forms in the process, and it often transforms the direction of the research as regards the data collection or the quality of the analysis. It forms in the cycle of the observation– analysis – new observation – new analysis. Some ethnographers claim that the analysis method is mainly thematic analysis, though it may not take place at the time of recognition, as details may remain uncategorized and only allow themselves to be organized into themes at a much later date. (Atkinson, 1992; Lappalainen, Hynninen, Kankkunen, Lahelma & Tolonen, 2007)

Other researchers, however, claim that ethnographic analysis cannot be thematic analysis because ethnography is about learning from experiences and it aims at the understanding of the phenomena by gaining access to their inside, and the cycle of observation– analysis – re-observation – re-analysis does not render itself to simple piecing of items. Therefore the phenomenon cannot be pieced into parts but it must be described more holistically as a synthesis (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008). Noblit & Hare (1988) describe synthesising as meta-ethnography, which is firmly based in the interpretive paradigm and includes qualitative research approaches such as ethnography, interactive, hermeneutic or phenomenological etc. The syntheses are so called "thick narratives" (Geertz, 1973), the liability and validity of which are proved by the verisimilitude to our common experiences. I understand this as *the langue* discussed in the *Epistemology* subchapter.

Reporting about a culture with its many voices and ways of expression, its sentiments and emotions in a textual form with language is a complex challenge. A social world needs to be reconstructed with the medium of language and shared such as the researcher understood them, with also outsider individuals and communities. Salo (2007) describes, "It felt there was no way of finding signs for the spontaneity and vivacity of the (informants') language. It felt as if I had got caught between two worlds, the righter one that had been lived in, and the one to be changed into a text. I decided to try and stay in both. A reader characterised my text as An Alice in the Wonderland narrative, where the text seems to be moving in a nowhere land."

Indeed, the fieldwork experiences do not easily turn into writing: How to convey my understanding that formed like an onion peeled or a plant well tended, sporadically deepened through flashlike insights into the darkness of my understanding about the informants. (Geertz,

1988; Salo, 2007) This multi-level and multi-angle unfolding and construction of understanding, knowing and knowledge is not only a methodological and ethical research challenge, but also an epistemological issue.

Epistemology

As an ethnographer it becomes very hard to believe in the division established also in the field of social sciences between positivist research being an objective conveyor of the truth, and the qualitative, interpretive or descriptive research being subjective, i.e. non-objective conveyor of the truth, due to the fact that knowledge of the truth is conveyed only through the perspectives and experiences of the informants, reconstructed by the researcher's reporting, not reproducible as such or quantifiable.

Hence, to know about the truth is to know about as many sides and views into it as feasible. As long as we can share a sufficient understanding in common of these, we are forming a view of the truth. This is a relativist conception of the truth, but also parallel to the structural linguistic view, according to which our ability to share meanings in general is based on the fact that we share common conceptual denominators with a range of conceptual variations around this core. Being originally a linguist, and neither being able to erase that knowledge or understanding, nor willing to do so, my credo concerning defining the accessibility of finding the truth through research is based on the finding about the structure of our perceivable world by de Saussure (1959; Häkkinen, 1998). De Saussure stated the difference and the connection between langue and parole as follows: _langue, (the signified) is "the basic conception of e.g. what a table is like that we all share"_ and _parole, (the signifier) is "an individual's conception of a specific table"._

In this view, we would not understand each other in any language without the underlying, mutually shared core concept of the _langue_. When it comes to a multicultural group, my question also became to wonder how much of the _langue_ needs to be shared in order for us to share a meaning, when the _paroles_ dim our interactions.

Literature review

Since the inception of the MPEL program, the curriculum (MPEL curriculum 2007-2009 (2014), p. 6) makes a statement on learning through the humanistic socio-constructivist learning concept with the aim of building a community of learners:

> Our concept of the human being is based on the humanistic-socio-constructivist views. The humanistic perspective entails that we believe in every human's right, capability and potential to grow towards becoming themselves and we are committed to enhancing this growth. Further, we believe in the reality of the human being constructing him/herself in relation to another human being and it is our objective to enable the opportunity for this growth.

> Our program has elements of the socio-constructivist perspective of knowledge building. We respect knowledge and the accumulation of it and we endeavour to create knowledge from knowledge. We believe in knowledge growth, creation and realization from the social

context where it is encountered and researched. From this perspective follows the maxim that in our program we expect regular attendance in the classes, as the student is an essential contributor to the learning of his/her peers and that of the lecturer in the context of the class.

Thus, the pedagogical solutions applied are based on the needs of the learners and their previous learning experiences. The focus is on learning. Learning is constructed in the interaction and reflection of research based knowledge and learners' learning processes and learning background. One of the focuses of the program is to build a community of learners.

To aim at building a community of learners or a learning community followed naturally from the ideal of using pedagogy that would take into consideration the students' earlier learning experiences, the more so as they were anticipated to come from most varied ethnic and learning backgrounds. As the aim was to apply the socio-constructivist learning concept, the natural consequence was to aim at a collaborative study and learning environment because social interaction is the garden for constructivism to grow. The humanistic concept of human being in practice means commitment to the dignity and space of each learner, building a supportive learning environment both in regard to individual contribution and learning modes, required time, advising and evaluation. This was to ensure an atmosphere of confidence for learning together and networking for success during study and post study. Collaborative learning does not exist without collaborative leadership, both being essentials for professional learning communities to emerge and sustain. (Hord, 1997; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006)

The curriculum (p. 6) addresses learning and achieving results supported by a culture of care and caring, a core element in responsible leadership which responds to the learners' needs:

The culture of accessing every student, taking them into consideration as distinguished clients and unique human beings conveying a remarkable input into the MPEL program, is parallel to the customer culture characteristic of the Finnish programmes of the Institute, through qualification to advanced studies and PhD programmes. The student cohorts coming from all corners of the world, an additional approach of care and caring has been developed into the program to ensure meeting the students' needs expeditiously and to secure a steady progress in their academic achievement.

To sum up, in this research the overarching three conceptual arenas for learning are 1) the humanistic socio-constructivist learning approach, 2) building a community of learners through collaborative interaction and 3) responsible and caring leadership.

Humanistic - socio-constructivist learning approach

As written in the program curriculum, the concept of the human being was to respect the worth, integrity and equity of every human being also in their role as learners (see curriculum quote from page 6 above). The diversity of the students implied that in order to reach success in learning for each individual, in other words equity in outcomes, we understood we would need to use the

socio-constructivist learning approach, where new knowledge is constructed in interaction with others, and where one's previous knowledge and learning background and identity are an essential input into the mutual learning. Construction of meaning and learning would take place in social interaction and interchange in individual processes, supported by a collaborative learning environment (Vygotsky 1978; Weick 1995). This was in line with the fact that Finnish pedagogy had long voiced the need for student centered learning instead of teacher centered teaching, and the process which Jarvis (1992) describes taking place at the interface of the learner's biography and the sociocultural environment where they live. Balakrishnan & Claiborne (2012) summarise Vygotsky's contributions to the socio-constructivist theory into three core perspectives: 1) learner's active contribution to the development of his/her own consciousness, 2) the importance of social interaction in development, and 3) the notion of the mediating role of language in the communication. Vygotsky also considered emotion an essential factor in understanding consciousness, emphasising the construction of emotion and directivity, not only of meaning. Vygotsky's holistic approach to constructivism correlates with the ethical constructivism of Noddings and Starratt to be discussed in connection with responsible leadership and an ethics of care and caring.

The humanistic socio-constructivist learning concept at best reaches what Vygotsky (1978) calls the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where interaction and collaboration as learning methods are a key. To perform above one's actual performance level, whether a student or a teacher, is enabled by the challenge of the peers and teachers. The nature of the interactions in collaborative learning is decisive for the quality of learning. Schmidt & Winskel

(2008) discuss the ZPD from Mercer's 1996 and 2000 (cited in ibid.) concept of re-conceptualisation named Intermental Development Zone (IDZ), which is dependent on constructive challenging discourse that may enable each individual learner in a group to benefit from collaborative learning experiences. Non-constructive discourse such as disputational or cumulative does not enhance joint problem solving and learning. Cumulative interaction consists of repetitions, confirmations and elaborations, whereas disputational discourse comprises disagreement, competitiveness, and individual decision making. In line with this argument, Arvaja, Häkkinen, Rasku-Puttonen,, and Eteläpelto (2002) posit that cumulative and disputational talk do not facilitate joint problem solving, nor do they entail constructive criticisms or suggestions. Further, Arvaja *et al.* posit that the quality of interactional learning is dependent on its relation to the structure of the task and to group dynamics, e.g. how the participants balance their personal views, status and power, and that symmetrical roles as regards the knowledge level of participants are conducive to learning, whereas strong asymmetry in knowledge prevents learning. Yet, negotiation from different perspectives promotes learning.

Research has also indicated other challenges in ensuring successful learning for all participants in collaborative learning environments. The tasks at hand may create confusion about arguments, damaging conflict can happen, individuals may dominate and marginalize others, and students may spend too much time off-task or be engaged in social conversations. Also rudeness of an individual towards their partner can limit overall success. (Arvaja *et al.,* 2002; Schmitz & Winskel, 2008). *Monoculturalism - Multiculturalism – Interculturalism.*

The concept of culture has a great variety of varying and evasive definitions. For this research the ones adopted are those of Hofstede and Giddens. Hofstede's metaphor of culture is an iceberg with only the tip above the surface level visible with language, food, clothing and manners and the like, and the values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and communication styles floating hidden (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Giddens (1989) defines culture in relation to society: Society is the web of interrelationships connecting individuals, and culture means shared and common understandings about a way of life, functioning as an attractor, a "glue" that connects people and differentiates one group from the other.

Finns generally perceive themselves as a *monocultural* nation, where cultural identity is defined mainly by ethnicity or race. However, diversity is a far more varied state in the form of cultural, lifestyle, subculture, social, economic, gender, sexual, religious, age, regional etc. diversity in also every Finnish school and classroom, increasingly so. (Jokikokko, 2003; Räsänen, 2007) In contexts like Finland, the standard interpretation of the concept of *multiculturalism* refers to several ethnicities, but a far less sensitive definition true to reality would be to relate it to an environment where several diverse groups in terms of societal culture live together. (Jokikokko, 2003; Räsänen, 2007). Dimmock & Walker (2005) recommend multiculturalism to be defined as multi-ethnicity, as an environment where more than one ethnic group is represented.

The concept of *interculturalism* is used of the relationship between diverse cultural groups but also as an equivalent of multiculturalism (e.g. Banks, 1999). In this research multiculturalism refers to the fact that the students represent diverse ethnicities but interculturalism is the most relevant concept as soon as the collaboration and interaction between (inter) the ethnicities take place. Multiculturalism would rather refer to existence side by side, regardless of interaction. The third culture is an emerging concept in multicultural education, meaning a space created between the diverse groups where every party is sufficiently competent interculturally, to be able to refrain from their own established meanings and to give space to those of others, so that a living space of sufficient mutual understanding evolves. (Banks, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

For multicultural groups to learn effectively and with reduced friction, increasing cultural knowledge and sensitivity to peers' cultural identities needs to be studied, practised, and inculcated. Intercultural competence is defined as knowledge, skills and behaviours of and regarding interaction with the other culture. It is characterized e.g. by openness, adaptation, modesty and respect, knowledge of host country and culture, relationship building, self-knowledge, intercultural communication (Canadian Foreign Service Institute, 2000). Bennett (1998) introduces a model for developing intercultural sensitivity, where the scale goes from ethnocentrism characterised by denial, defensiveness and minimal contacts, towards ethno-relativism, where acceptance of differences, adaptation to them and integration to the differences take place naturally.

All too often in Finland intercultural competence has been studied through theme weeks, special courses, or projects as if it was a detachable entity from the life lived between the diverse cultures. Nieto and Bode criticise this approach, and posit instead that intercultural education is not a matter of methods and projects but a philosophy, a way of thinking at the world from different angles. Therefore, it should be present in all education and throughout the whole of the curriculum. Combining multicultural knowledge and competence with the values of equity and equality and

with giving space to diverse voices to be heard, some of the premises for building a so called third culture gain a chance to form. (Nieto & Bode, 2008; Talib 2002)

On one hand we are facing the challenge how leadership and management are affected by the diversity of societal culture, while globalisation moves us towards conformity. Still far too much of the leadership literature is written from an ethnocentric monocultural point of view, though the inclusion of societal culture ought to be a factor considered in teaching and learning, curriculum, methods, climate, culture, structures, the leadership and administration of the school. This is a challenge to teaching as well as leading and managing schooling, and teacher and leader education. (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). This was a challenge to this program, too.

Responsible leadership with care and caring

As stated in the program curriculum (p. 7), to guide the students through a demanding program, an approach of care and caring was perceived to be necessary in the program implementation. Its basis was in the humanistic concept of the human being, and the leadership approach comes from the domain of ethical leadership, where the well-being and service of the other is a priority. Noddings asks what and who leaders should be responsible for and replies, "For responsiveness and caring, for people's needs. " Noddings has described this kind of leadership as caring leadership. Caring is relational between the carer and the cared for and it is based on mutual consent and commitment. Its purpose is to enhance caring for the self, for the inner circle, the distant others, the environment and the globe, the man made environment and ideas, and it thrives best in circumstances of continuity of place, people and contents. (Noddings, 2005)

To care is in the core of responsible leadership and its dimension of moral accountability. The word 'responsible' derives from the Latin 'responsus', the past participle of 'respondere', to respond, the original meaning being 'to be responsible and answerable to another person'. Responsibility is more than obedience or compliance. It is active interaction considering the needs and preferred responses to them taking into consideration the outcomes of one's actions on the lives of others. Starratt (2005) has built a five-tier model of the multidimentional leader that is necessary for exercising responsible leadership. Starratt posits that responsible leadership is based on consenting to growth as a human being (1), as a civil servant (2), as an educator (3), as an educational administrator (4), and educational leader (5). Tiers one and two – to grow to be a human being and a civil servant - are the most fundamental, but all tiers are interdependent, so that one is dysfunctional without the others.

There is an increasing call for inclusive leadership in the globalising society. Responsible leadership with an ethics of care and caring responds to this call in that it is per definition committed to serving as a bridge for "forging cross-cultural alliances, practices, and procedures", and providing a problem solving culture where the leader, student and teacher, endeavour to develop competences such as self-awareness, empathy, discipline and practice. (Temple & Ylitalo, 2009) As Temple and Ylitalo (ibid. p. 286) state, "an inclusive approach is a holistic issue that stems from a mindset, values, and willingness that must be authentic (…) it raises the consciousness of administrators in developing a systematic multicultural worldview."

Findings and discussion

As stated in the methodology chapter, this sample of findings emerged in the cycle of observation – analysis – new observation – analysis etc. becoming syntheses, which are now presented. To claim the findings emerged from thematic analysis is in my view in practice undoable due to the long duration of the research, the multiplicity of the data, and the returns to repeated interactive situations, which however were never identical even if they might deal with similar issues and modes of interaction. The metaphor of the analysis continuing as "peeling like the onion layers" is a synonym to the synthesis creating the findings. Hence, an analysis through itemisation, categorisation, thematisation does not render itself doable as it would require a data sample from an interaction time with clear confines. As is typical of ethnographic reporting, some of the findings are rendered through "thick description".

Teaching and learning culture

Beginnings and first touches are important. Prior to their entry to campus, the friendly emailing conveyed the students some of the culture they were to meet. The teaching and learning culture of the institute was found very welcoming by the students and teachers and the true pride and trust we had in the program was conveyed to the students from their first moments on campus. At the launch of the program to the first students, in the warmly welcoming coffee party of the 2007 cohort, the Dean described the Institute as a hardworking baby of the faculty with a friendly climate where the student would be listened to and both parties would learn in collaboration and the student would make nice memories to come back to. The director of the Institute in his address described the learning culture as collaborative and cooperative versus an ordinary university department and gave a clear outline of the program, its requirements and context, exuding his confidence in it.

After the event the first arrival to campus said with a happy smile, "It was nice. Now we know where we've come to. I'm sure this is a good program. My response was, "We think so, too. We are going to make it", to which the student replied, "I'm sure we will." He was to be the first PhD holder graduating with his Master's in autumn 2009 and his PhD in January 2014 having financed his PhD study with part time work. In the following March of 2008 I was having lunch with a student after the office hours, telling her about the news in the regional paper of the university rising high in the research university rankings. She responded, "You are always so confident about the quality of this university and don't hesitate to express it!" I responded, "Yes,

I am confident and I express it when needed but you must also hear what I am not talking about at all." With the years passing, the status of the welcoming parties would vary, as would the nuances regarding how we conveyed our views of the program.

Motivation

In regard to student recruitment, we managed to select truly motivated ones. Asked to introduce their goals in the first welcoming party, the students mentioned they wanted to climb up the ladder, to become educational change agents, to train their staffs to the next level, to be headmasters,

ministers of education, to do not only Master's but also PhDs, to bring new knowledge to principals back home, to be professors, educational researchers, diplomats with education portfolios, consultants, to develop communities free of crime, to write children's books as teaching resources, to change their country through management skills in policy making and implementation etc. This determination persisted through thick and thin through the program, challenged with our methodologies, concepts and the workload and contributed to the high retention rate in the program. The motivation was both intrinsic and extrinsic, not rarely pushed by the expectations of the family back home, who might have contributed a great deal to the finances enabling the study abroad, a fact documented in earlier research as well Failure or poor performance would have meant a loss of face in front of the family (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002).

Our motivation and aim had been to educate leaders into the field of education, but we soon learned the global reality from our students: In the countries with top down, hierarchical or dictatorial governance, leadership and management positions are not gained with expertise but with seniority and nepotism, and many said they would not have a chance in decades or none at all as they lacked the necessary connections. Returning into their home countries, they have been compatible with their Master's as teachers, consultants, researchers, office heads, few have gone international, some have stayed in Finland changing their field of work.

From behaviourism to socio-constructivism

In practice the learning culture with new methodologies started immediately upon arrival. In alignment with the socio-constructivist learning concept (Vygotsky, 1978), each lecture consisted of pair and group discussions and debates in class with their outcomes shared to the whole group and attention paid to everyone getting their voice heard. Individual and group presentations were prepared, mind maps produced, readings given or retrieved by student in the electronic library and academic reading practised for the next class. Essays were written. The electronic learning platform was in use for sharing the course path (program), materials, information, discussions and assignments.

All this was a challenge with the steady work load and the school like schedule with more contact classes than usual in a university program. The number of contact classes was justified by the concept of collaborative and intercultural learning of the program: How to learn about intercultural understanding and working together without a structured opportunity to do so? The program had only three written examinations as instead the credits were earned by participating in the process, working in the classes and completing the course assignments, in which the given questions were to be answered adapting the acquired knowledge. (MPEL curriculum, 2007-2009)

Over 80% of the students came from learning environments with huge class sizes both in school and university, evaluation in the form of written book exams, the teacher or lecturer being a top down authority delivering the knowledge and requiring silent obedience. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) have analysed this culture as having a strong power distance between superiors and subordinates. In that culture to ask questions is a token of stupidity and a cause of shame. To ask questions is to admit one does not understand or know. In our learning culture with the socio-constructivist learning concept asking questions and participating in discussions is a sign of interest to know and want to learn more. Naturally, the range and the pace of development in this

regard was most varied. An Asian young female student and a mature African male with a leadership position at home were at the two ends of the pendulum sharing a similar problem but covering it differently: the young female with silence, the mature male covering up his ignorance with actively discussing beside the point. Here also the gender issue played its part. Another distinct challenge was academic reading and writing in assignment delivery and especially in writing the thesis as in many universities at the Bachelor's level not even essay writing takes place. The program consisted of academic writing modules, research methodology courses and research seminars for discussing the research process; nevertheless, academic writing needed a remarkable supportive advising resource.

Assignments in the students' past had been given with a stimulus-response or order-obedience mode in line with the behaviouristic learning concept (Illeris, 2004). Now they were given with a formulation of "Here is the case or problem, analyse and solve it adapting the knowledge and understanding you have gained from the lectures, readings and class discussions" in line with the socio-constructivist learning concept (Vygotsky, 1978; Jarvis, 1992) The confusion was heavy in the second semester of cohort 2008: Having received the course assignment for the management and administration course, where they had been given the demographic data of a real community in change and they were requested to adopt the role of an educational administrator either at school or community level in the said community and create a solution how to provide education in the changing context, their spokesman came to me asking, "What exactly do you want us to do? We have no idea." This was a cohort not into regular rigor in reading assignments compared to the first cohort, and the fact that a female lecturer had given the assignment, also played a role in their confusion to believe what they saw as an assignment. However, the problem was solved with extra tuition at a cup of coffee, where the assignment was rediscussed relating it to the mandatory course readings and class discussions on related themes, all of which had to be mastered to complete the assignment. In the case of that cohort, the understanding about this modality was reached and the assignments were completed accordingly. However, it happened just as well, that there could be assignment versions, reading which one could only wonder how varied the interpretations about the assignment itself or about the readings could be in case rote learning and memorisation were not sufficient study modes to manage with the assignment.

Practice works wonders when the learning environment is perceived as safe and empowering so that one's face keeps saved also when the learning skills are challenged in the new learning environment. On one hand the Institute's culture of ideally considering every student equal and attending to everyone's voice being heard in instruction as well as responding to their other needs was conducive to safe learning. The fact that the learning culture accepted dissenting voices to be uttered and dealt with was described by a student in October 2007 follows, "(…) there is an atmosphere that problems can be raised to discussion and dealt with properly". On the other hand, the developmental ability and aim of the individual student in self-leadership played a role in the students' learning skills developing. The higher the individual's learning skills in regard to their self-leadership as part of identity and its relation to the peers and teachers developed, as Starratt (2005) presents with his five tiers to responsible leadership capacity, the more harmonious and productive the learning environment became. The core of leadership begins from leading oneself. To grow into an educational leader according to Starratt, the path goes from developing as a human being and civil servant towards being an educational leader. In a multicultural group there is the extra challenge of relating to otherness. Where the individual leadership development and

understanding intertwined with the intercultural skills advancing from ethnocentrism towards ethnorelativism, the ability to lead oneself and in the cohort was highest and productive in terms of group harmony, focus and determination to adopt new, required study skills.

A description of this group efficacy growing in less than two months is from October 24, 2007. It reads in my ethnographic notes,

> As I went down to the studio backstage, John said to me, "There's a heavy discussion in (…) class, they are debating their guts out". So it was. The Teacher was sitting among the students in the front and listening, amazed. Afterwards he commented, "I wonder if they had ever changed their ideas so thoroughly and in such depth, to the face. There must be a deep level of confidence so as to make that possible. Anna sent me a question slip via John: " There was a viscious discussion in class today". There was someone coming for an interview later (Anna?, Britt?), I asked both, what the debate based on and how it felt. They said it had been so deep, so sensitive and tense that everyone had realized they had then reached a new level of confidence and the debate was something like holy and untouchable, which no one wanted to touch upon later; it was something untouchable.

Intercultural learning: from ethnocentrism towards ethnorelativism

In the area of intercultural understanding and behaviours, it was the gender issue which caused the most friction until it abated in each cohort. It was a regular issue in cohorts with males coming from cultures where the status of women and particularly young women is low without access to education and the work force. In Finland women occupy any work and study place including university, and on average half of the cohort was always females, which was a challenge to both genders with multi-ethnic origins in the same program. Refusing to "understand" a female teacher's assignment is an example of this. Another was regular distracting and overlooking behaviours in young female teachers' classes, which first had to be controlled with disciplining. These behaviours were first regular with males in their thirties and beyond. In group work assignments they first tended to bully the young female peers to do all the work or how it should be done, without noticing they roused anger, or they tried getting the females typing their assignments when their own typing skills were poor. At times extra group negotiations were needed to have them see the females' point of view and to get the work done fairly.

The male behaviours were honed by regular access to the unavoidability of females everywhere around them and by courses in intercultural and interpersonal communication. We also created together what were called Home Rules, that is an agreement on how to individually contribute to an atmosphere in which everyone is at ease working. Gradually, with varying degrees of success per each cohort, intercultural understanding developed towards ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1998) where otherness became a sufficiently commonplace fact to live with.

A young man from the first cohort had it very hard in the beginning: When talking to a female staff or peer, he never looked them in the eye first but at their right shoulder, looking very tense and joyless. He was also known not to greet the young female peers, which quickly grew close to an explosion in the group. About two months from his arrival, he exploded in the

Institute bursting out at the female program director, "What is this country, with females everywhere you go!" This began abating with constant exposure to this otherness and his knowledge about our country and its values base as well as of those of his peers increasing. First we could identify tolerance growing and then relaxed, polite interaction with anyone he came across. One day in his third month he was seen sitting on a sofa with his arm around the girl's shoulders who he never greeted in the first two months. Today he is a fine example of an intercultural citizen who moves fluently in his two cultural worlds. His development illustrates social learning as Jarvis (1992 posits, and constructivist learning in alignment with Vygotsky's (1978) three dimensions: development of the learner's own consciousness, the importance of social learning in development and the notion of the mediating role of language in interaction. His is a dramatic example of a learning ability illustrating the process that at varying levels of intensity took place with each individual in this environment.

The second major finding in this category was the power distance in the form of respect for seniority and position. We would not be called by our first names as is customary in Finnish teacher-student relationships, but Doctor, Madam, Professor. Having reached the mother status in the program, the African students might call me Ma, a title with high respect and emotion, which for me in my culture was very touching. Power distance would also show in shyness and refrain from asking questions, opening the door, carrying a teacher's bag and books to office, and many kinds of general attentiveness, which is rare if not even non-existent in the behaviour of Finnish students. On the other hand, students with this cultural background would expect heavy giving of orders, which is a mistaken code of conduct for a Finnish teacher. To give an example, I used to explain patiently and kindly that punctual time management is a norm in Finland, with the result that the students from contexts of polychronic time kept coming late till one day I lost my temper and spelt out the order to arrive in time. I was amazed that my demeanour was accepted with contentment and the response, "Why didn't you say so as early as we arrived on campus?"

The features the international students most paid attention to about Finland besides the strong gender equity and difficulty getting contact to Finns were the high living standard and quality of facilities and services whether in public transport or study facilities in university. The heavy drinking habits of Finns and their social acceptance was a constant surprise, whereas the secularity of the society caused anxiety or sadness as religion was like a taboo, which could not be discussed in this society. Many students were truly unhappy about this dimension missing in relating to any Finnish contacts they might have formed as religion was an integral part of many of our international students' identity and they attended the weekly service regularly. Their religious institutions were also places of belonging to a community; some students found a community also in their Finnish congregations. Religion was part of the air we breathed in the program, and the students voiced their views of their religion and the virtues a human being should exhibit. The spirituality, both voiced and unvoiced, of the international students was first a surprise to me as in my culture it is a very private issue but it became a very natural issue I grew fond of, sustaining with each cohort coming. The first token was always the question where to find their religious home and when the services would take place.

An unforgettable moment of sanctity took place in my office one day in January 2008. A male student had had to travel home before Christmas to bury his father and arrange his financial

responsibilities in the family as he was the eldest son. Before departing he had feared I would expel him from the program due to his long absence from campus, but in our system flexible arrangements are used in these situations, so he could travel relieved. Upon returning back he paid a visit to my office, which the following note describes:

> Adam is back. A couple of hours spent on checking the course work of courses in progress. (…) I offered him a cup of coffee with Lent bakery. When leaving, he knelt in front of my desk upon his right side knee, crossed his hands, bowed his head and said, "Thank you Ma so much for everything you have done to support me. I thank you so much/I am so thankful for you." A truly embarrassing situation for a Finnish female but unbelievably gentle, sensitive and beautiful and entirely impossible to imagine happening in our culture so as to convey the credibility and the sincerity of the behaviour, not to mention the soft, quiet sense of sanctity in the moment.

Another example of intercultural difference emerging from divergent societal norms occurred three weeks later in a class I was teaching of administration. The discussion in class was moving in administrative and legislative variations in regard to human rights across countries. Finnish male student illustrates his point about differences giving an example, "In Finland rape in marriage was criminalised a few years ago." The same student from the above example jumps up and says agitated, "What! Rape in marriage! That is not possible! My wife has to respond to my desires any time." The Finnish student jumps up and raises his voice, "Your wife is an individual with her own rights and timing of desires, also in marriage!" The entire group was boiling. In the event I used top down management to extinguish the fire, saying, "This issue is not likely to be solved in this class, so let us return to the core topic of today."

In learning about the intercultural otherness in the context of Finland, and in this case Central Finland, the international student faced two layers of it: one was the environment of monocultural Finland with novel features as referred to already, and the other was the multiethnicity of the peer group as well as the other international students, where they found their communities. In regard to Finland, the difficulty of having contact with the Finnish people as they were perceived as shy and reserved and not speaking English, was a continued experience. What passing contacts there were, they were mainly reported to be friendly in central Finland. In consequence, the communities the students could relate to were either among the international students or their own ethnic groups.

As for the university, the orientation from the International Office with the initial orientation week and tutors welcoming the arriving students at the station and attending to their practical needs such as finding their housing and its practicalities, finding their way in town, opening bank accounts etc. was considered very helpful and accommodating to manage the entry stage. Similarly, the Institute's welcoming party was appreciated. The international students were also invited by the university to the Opening of the Academic Year and the Christmas Party with porridge and mulled wine. However, as the curriculums of the Finnish programmes in the Faculty of Education were not taught in English and as the courses arranged for European Erasmus exchange students were not open to Master's students, contacts to Finnish students were close to nil if not made through free time activities. Additionally, the Master's students were also otherwise "invisible" as they were not invited to the yearly hearings of student feedback until the spring of 2012, or into work groups,

probably because of the language barrier. The international students were equally invisible as regards the student associations' activities inside the faculty, till an Institute employee presented an invitation to them at the end of 2010. The contact they had to the Faculty administration or to the other disciplines was the formal representation in the autumn welcome party, and in later years the Head of Academic Affairs, till the internationalisation strategy of the Faculty led into launching a second Master's degree program in 2013 and renewing the curricula, making optional specialisation tracks from all disciplines in the Faculty available for both programmes.

Our program was a small niche separate from the mainstream faculty, which hardly differed from the situation of international programmes in the other faculties. The exposure opportunity to contact and learning about and with these students was missing due to strategic and structural constraints and missing English language skills. Bennett's (1998) concept of an ethnocentric mindset materialised in strategies, structures and human resource development. There lacked in strategic thinking or planning at university and faculty level what Dimmock and Walker (2005, 94-95) contend to be functional interdependence of elements for a whole-school (read: university) design of the learning-centered school: learning outcomes and curriculum, learning processes and experiences, teaching approaches and strategies, technology, organisational structures, human and financial resources and their management including appraisal, leadership and organizational culture.

Skills acquisition

One cannot emphasise enough the importance of foreign language skills in internationalisation, gaining access to and learning about otherness, in this case the importance of the English language skills. Failing or missing language skills were a deterrent to taking contact between natives and foreign students - and staffs - through structural arrangements for learning together or naturally in passing. When the Minister of Education in 2009 suggested in alignment with the Internationalisation Strategy of HE home internationalisation to be realised on home campuses through every native student studying e.g. one course in English with international students, the opposition was fierce and the suggestion labled as futile and irrelevant to Finnish students' skills acquisition. A huge opportunity of learning on campus has gone missing year after year.

The language skills were a challenge also in teaching; one yearly complaint was the level of the Finnish lecturers' language skills. It was a challenge not only in traditional lecturing but in understanding the students' questions and coping in interactive situations such as assignments and thesis advising. An advisor with failing language skills has little opportunity getting the message delivered. Combined with intercultural and interpersonal challenges this was a real issue. To date there is no language proficiency qualification requirement for teachers in international degree programmes in Finland. Hence, it remains an individual program director's responsibility to solve the problems that arise. The national academic approach is still rather ethnocentric though change is taking place, however far too slowly for ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1998) in this regard to benefit the masses of graduates entering for example the teaching force, research, export etc. Anticipation of the rapid global demographic change to reach Europe has been missing.

Similarly, the international students' English language skills were varied as there are a great many Englishes on the globe, and though they had to prove a sufficient level of proficiency prior to access to the program. Yet, there hardly exists a testing method that would guarantee a selection of students with even proficiency in reading, listening, speaking and writing. Regardless of the proven language proficiency per se, the academic reading and writing skills were the area with the most challenge. Many students had not learnt analytical reading but were used to memorising texts and repeating the contents, whereas in our academic conventions it is the analytical reading that matters. The same went for academic writing skills as many had never had to write even an essay at their Bachelor's level. The program provided a substantial number of courses teaching both skills but it was the practice done via individualised advising that worked, provided the personal interaction, motivation and the English skills of both parties were sufficient. Another area of varied academic skills were the presentation skills, which were developed with regular practices in each course.

Also general study and life skills varied considerably, such as ICT skills, individual daily time management, planning one's work to perform in a timely manner, taking care of practical issues such as cooking, eating healthy, sleeping enough, taking exercise, commuting to classes, making ends meet with money, doing one's laundry, managing in the winter weather and so on. In sum, students who had independently taken care of these issues at home, had lesser problems. Also here the gender issue was visible, to the detriment of male students from some cultures till they caught up with the new standards required.

In this kind of a program with the multicultural set of students, learning and the demands on leading learning are bounded by the values basis and certain homogeneity of the Finnish society and culture, the humanistic-socio-constructivist concept of learning, the diversity of the student cohort and between the student cohorts as well as the diversity of the teachers. Vysotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development ZPD was identifiable when students got fully engaged in the interaction and collaboration and responded to the challenge from peers and teachers, their performance rising above their prior performance level. This outcome showed as an individual active contribution to the development of one's consciousness and as an understanding of the role of one's language in communication. The development of this competence, i.e. giving up the behaviouristic learning framework and habit was closely related to intercultural learning at large. In other words, there was a correlation between successful intercultural learning and successful constructivist learning but the individual pace and range of success were highly varied.

As for Mercer's reconceptualization of the ZPD, called Intermental Development Zone IDZ (Arvaja et al., 2002; Schmidt & Winskel, 2008; Balakrishnan & Claiborne, 2012), the findings indicate that the quality of the collaborative discourse is of consequence. Negotiative and constructive discourse enhance learning, constructive criticism and joint problem solving in collaborative interaction, whereas disputational or cumulative discourse impede them. Both lines were regular phenomena especially in group work. Disputational interaction comprises disagreement, competitiveness and individual decision making; cumulative interaction involves repetitions, confirmations and elaborations. What was also verified was the fact that the quality of interactional learning was dependent on its relation to the structure of the task and to group dynamics such as how the individuals balanced their views, status and power. Symmetrical roles as regards knowledge level are conducive to learning, whereas strong asymmetry in knowledge prevents learning. Much is

saved by negotiation also in asymmetrical groups. (Arvaja et al., 2002) However, in a multicultural group not only the disputational and cumulative discourse but for example the gender issue, seniority and prior status might emerge as top down silencing and dominating the younger, the female and the less experienced peers until opening and giving up one's original cultural cage or the individual development in leading oneself was well in process.

In sum, socio-constructivism goes far deeper as regards learning in a multi- and intercultural context, which is a mosaic where differences abound not only in concepts of learning, but also in the concept of knowledge and human being, the role and objective of education in society and the values they are based on, meanings of concepts, group and interpersonal behaviours, individual behaviours, intercultural communication, language proficiencies, academic study and life skills, adaptation to Finnish society and academic context, societal and administrative structures and models. All the parts of the mosaic have a bearing on learning and leading the learning.

Responsible leadership for learning

Leadership is about leading people to perform the task for which the organization exists (e.g. Fullan, 2005). The isolation of the Institute inside the Faculty and the international Master's degree program emphasised the importance of responsible leadership and caring for the international students. Many called it "our home away from home", whereas voices such as "why do they need to be pampered?" were heard from some faculty employees' side. I trust much of the responsible leadership approach in practice reads from the lines above due to the fact that it is intertwined in every finding of this report.

As for caring, to support the international students to succeed till graduating and beyond, their needs were attended to in a culture of confidence in alignment with Noddings' view: caring is relational, based on the mutual consent between the carer and the cared for. Relationality led to confidence and trust between the students and staffs accountable for them. One could also call this pastoral care because we did not shun away from life: Besides studying, the students lived their unique lives falling in love, getting abandoned or separated, enjoying marital bliss, suffering divorce, miscarrying, giving birth, grieving death of next of kin, suffering from ill health and so on, all shared and supported when the need was there. Not to do so would have been a heartless abandonment. This was our leadership philosophy: to show in practice how holistic caring is, however not interfering with an individual's privacy. The outcome was a great deal of sharing and emotional relief, leading to perseverance in study and graduation.

As Temple and Ylitalo (2009, 286) contend, responsible leadership with an ethics of care and caring "provides a problem solving culture where the leader, student and teacher, endeavour to develop competences such as self-awareness, empathy, discipline and practice (…) an inclusive approach is a holistic issue that stems from a mindset, values, and willingness that must be authentic (…) it raises the consciousness odministrators in developing a systematic multicultural worldview." Responsible leadership was the glue that pulled the students through the learning challenges so that they graduated and moved on with a sustainable, well-practised leadership model learnt in action.

Development of self-awareness and reflection ability

Looking back, in the early months of the ethnographic observation I was very confident I would become an insider amongst the informants, would gain a clear understanding and be able to convey precise, detailed interpretations of my observations, experiences and the interactions. In other words I believed I could produce a content analysis through items, categories, and thematisation. I anticipated to become an insider in the first two semesters. Instead, at the end of the second semester, I said to both the informants and my colleagues that anything we "understand" is a scratch on the surface. My motto became, "Don't take anything at face value" as your own cultural parameters simply do not match the ones you observe and experience in the interaction. To expand one's own parameters for a better understanding of the otherness is an individual process not only for the researcher, but also for the informants in a longstanding research with daily interaction. The question remains to what an extent it is possible. In terms of de Saussure's (1959) distinction between *the langue* and *the paroles*, this means that it is the paroles that challenge our understanding of intercultural differences, academic conventions, social norms and behaviors. Or were we dealing with divergent social *langues,* which was why their *paroles* proved challenging to understand? As yet, I do not have an answer.

A research of long duration and frequent interaction impacts also the informants as they both observe the process and are active participants. Research is an additional reflection tool for them. There emerged a pronounced capacity for students to develop into what I named as auto-ethnographers, which showed in growing self-awareness and reflection ability into their own development.

An example of an incident of growing self-awareness and reflection ability is the in class discussion in October 2007 introduced above. Another one is clearly documented in e.g. the Personal Study Plans discussed once per three semesters, mostly with the researcher in her role as an academic advisor. For example, male student A2007's views developed from studying hard the course materials, to realising the importance of building also human networks. Female student A2008's goals were first statements about the course, study and life and taking action for learning and reading beyond the requirement as well as the intercultural learning opportunity, and lastly she compares the quality of her learning in the first and the second year:

> Question: What can you do during your studies to support your future plans? Male student A2007: Study hard, study well, and most of all, keep in mind how everything can be implemented, how applicable everything is? Also, what is worth of constant re-evaluation is whether I've identified any new information/courses that might be of use to me – as it is clear I am not too sure of the relevance of, say, optional studies; what to choose etc. 19.9.2007/PSP1

> Concentrate on the bits of work that are particularly meaningful for the future – thesis, methodological studies and general knowledge on educational leadership in variety of

aspects. In fact, the degree program has been such good quality so far that I have not perceived many areas that would not be worth plenty of interest! 12.2.2008/PSP 2

It is fascinating that it did not ring a bell initially to write "meet people", as that is ultimately what it takes to make things happen. Not that meeting people is the only thing necessary, yet it helps a lot. It's not only what you know, but at times who you know can help you a great deal. But in a nutshell I still sing the same nursery rhyme as in the beginning – work hard and you will be compensated. You cannot fake enthusiasm. 9.9.2008/PSP3

Question: My personal goals as a student. Female student A2008: In the first 3-4 months here, I want to follow the courses well and get used to the study and life here. Then more actions should be taken to have an initiative learning. Except the books and articles recommended by the lecturer, I need to read more about my major and my thesis. In an intercultural circumstance, I can learn more. At least I can get international perspectives on the inspiring questions we discuss. Good library and E-recourse services are well provided to get enough materials to learn further. So far, I am doing my best to improve my academic English and research communication. These are the basic foundations to study better. 12.12. 2008/PSP1

After one year's study, I really feel that I have much more knowledge regarding my major than before. When I read the articles I wrote last academic year, I realize that some of my points of view were so naïve, from which I can see I am making progresses more or less. (…)I read several books, such as (…) and a lot of articles. All those books help me establish the theory frame of my whole study. (…) 28.10.2009/PSP3

Cognizance of one's own cultural cage belongs to the rising self-awareness and reflection ability. In the interaction between the researcher, both the researcher and the informants grow more aware and cognizant of their cultural mindsets, behaviors, actions, choices, conventions. The informants, just as the researcher, become aware of their invisible cages formed by their cultures. This is enforced in the interchange of experience with the peers and the teachers in the collaborative learning environment. Without exposure to the otherness in person, there is far less chance to develop in intercultural competence skills, and the result is that one either remains at the level of no cognition or awareness of otherness, or one gains only intercultural knowledge, which does not contribute to the emotive side of learning, which in the emerging concept of learning is highly important besides cognitive and social learning, and essential for learning to become transformative for one's identity (Illeris, 2004; 2014). In sufficiently successful exposure to otherness, not only do we grow aware and cognizant of the diversity of the others, but of our own cultural cage. This correlates with the principles of developing intercultural competence as posited by e.g. Bennett (1998), Räsänen (2007), and Talib (2002). The change that takes place in us is the transformation from intercultural knowledge towards intercultural competence that transforms our understanding and worldview irreversibly.

Returning home

There emerged three groups of graduates in regard to returning home. Throughout the study they analysed the societal context of Finland and that of the peers' countries, their historical development, values base, societal environment, and theory and methodology. Group one compared their applicability to the home context taking the home context as a reality they were committed to return to and do their share for its development. I call them rational realists. The second group conducted the analysis similarly throughout the program but could not envisage returning to the home context because they saw no chance in either contributing to its development for the better or they perceived their values base changing so dramatically that they could not emotively return at least directly after graduation, or they perceived even ending into danger if promoting what they had learnt. I call this group idealistic realists. The third group either drew the conclusion they would change their field of work staying in Finland as it would pay much better than a position in education at home; a few have had employment in education in Finland or they went international. I call them individualists. To add, there were also those who the parents had sent abroad to study and build a life in safety and security, never to return to the unpredictable turbulence of the home country.

Conclusion

This report presents a view into a longitudinal study on the international Master's Degree Program in Educational Leadership, the only one in Finland. It focuses on the first two years of the program, 2007-2009 and introduces a sample of the findings from the ethnographic observation and document data. Conducting an ethnographic study is "different" as the precise focus of the research question is bound to be transformed due to the fact that field work observation and analysis produce new guidance for the direction of data collection. The more so in this research, where the data come from a new program in Finland. Also the report is "different", typical of ethnography, where the "thick description" is important to certify the findings through illustrating at least some of the process.

The findings indicate a great number of learning challenges both in the cognitive, social and emotive areas as well as in developing intercultural competence, not to mention practical life skills and one's unique life lived in the new environment. The findings indicate that it has been possible to live and learn with the challenges in a satisfactory manner as the students have graduated and have not dropped out, so the retention rate is high. The solution has been the learning environment of the program consisting of the humanistic socio-constructivist learning concept where studying took place in collaborative interaction. Students' needs were responded to with responsible leadership and a caring approach based on a relational, mutual consent between the carer and the cared for (Noddings, 2005). Responsible leadership means moral accountability for the other as demonstrated by how the program was being run, and by inculcating into practice the first two tiers of the multidimensional leader concept as presented by Starratt (2005): Leading others begins from leading oneself.

In view of this research process, the environment of excluding the international students from the mainstream student interactive encounters by governance structures is an alarming finding, and is

reason to alert the governance structures to transforming this into inclusion of foreign students expeditiously, not only in the faculty level programmes but also in the Finnish programmes of the Institute. It is not only a moral imperative of equity and human dignity, but it will also enhance the internationalisation of the native students and enhance the transformation of their citizenship and leadership capacity in the Finnish society that is rapidly growing more diverse not only in terms of multiethnicity, but in terms of societal cultures: Several hundred thousand Finns with their children live in poverty today. It is only through sensitising leadership to the many faces of diversity that our schools educate into a sustainable society and citizenship. In research literature there are examples of suggestions for programmes sensitising educational leaders to different realities of diversity in their communities (e.g. Gardiner & Enomoto, 2004; Johnson, 2008).

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