

International classroom @ TU/e

Optimizing group work in internationally heterogeneous student groups

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TU/e is both rapidly internationalizing and introducing CBL and groupwork learning. **What about international students in student teams carrying out open tasks?**

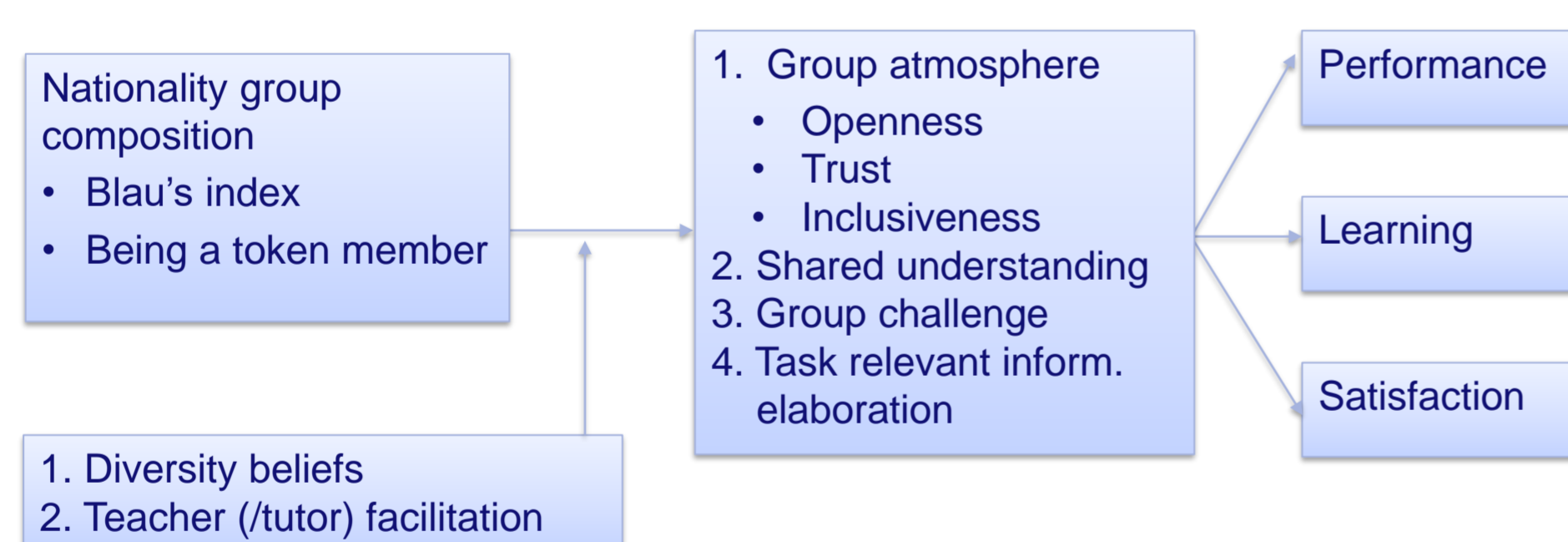
Design of the studies

Four sub-studies were carried out:

- Preliminary study: a general inventory based on interviews with lecturers and TU/e officials,
- Interview study: focusing on teachers and master students,
- Observation study: closely following 5 international students groups working on open group assignments,
- Survey study: developing and testing a model for international student group effectiveness in a multidisciplinary Engineering Design course (N=124).

Aim

The aim was to see how international classroom at TU/e performs in terms of student-group outcomes. What are pitfalls? What are tips for teachers and students?



Measuring model of group level learning in international groups

Methods and Analysis

The first three studies yielded various outcomes on general aspects of being an international student at TU/e, and on group collaboration. The observation study yielded detailed insight into the dynamics of international group work. These 3 studies were used to build the measuring model underlying the fourth (above). Survey data were analysed on the student-group level. This yielded a path-model explaining *group* outcomes in terms of the other *group* variables. Supplementing the observation study that revealed effects concerning *individual* students.

Key results

- For internationals, there may be issues that Dutch students and teachers overlook (residence permits, housing, finance, loneliness, family events) that can

- have a strong impact on well-being and performance.
- International students are often selected as highly motivated and highly capable but can easily be underestimated at first glance.
- International students who end up as 'token members' in a student group, run the risk of being marginalized and too often report being unhappy with the group work.
- The group atmosphere, openness, inclusiveness and diversity views at TU/e seem to be generally positive.
- The depth of task-related information processing was identified as the factor in the group process most strongly associated with good group performance and satisfaction.
- Such task-related elaborations partly depend on in-group trust and the building of a shared understanding of the task.
- As such, national heterogeneity may reduce trust within the group and can hinder the creation of a shared understanding of the task. And can therefore have some negative impact on task-related elaboration, and consequently on the outcomes of the group.
- However, positive diversity beliefs may fully counter this effect, by positively influencing in-group trust and in-depth task elaboration.

Practical tips

- Be sensitive to general issues that students may encounter, including those specific to internationals,
- Consider controlled group composition, striving for moderate heterogeneity in terms of nationality in all student groups and preventing students from becoming "token members",
- Promote and nurture positive diversity beliefs,
- Ensure that the early stages of group work:
 - are inclusive and builds trust,
 - makes actual student competences explicit,
 - connects all students to a deep task understanding.

References

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- Rispens, S., & Lopes Artaega, I. (2018). *Facilitating Multidisciplinary Collaboration*. <https://www.4tu.nl/cee/innovation/project/13050/facilitating-multidisciplinary-collaboration>
- Various papers and sources at: <https://www.4tu.nl/cee/innovation/project/13191/effective-learning-and-student-team-collaboration-in-the-international-classroom-at-tue>