
Reflections on Gender and Diversity in Cross-Cultural On-line Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the experiences of teaching gender and diversity applying a team based approach. The course ‘gender, culture and everyday life’ is taught as part of an online MA programme on Development Management to a group of international students from Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The underlying thinking in the course is that the cultural diversity of the students in terms of nationalities and their different every-day life experiences provide a good point of entry for discussing different understandings of gender roles and gender relations across cultures and social groups. In the course we try through the use of experience notes to encourage awareness of embodied and situated knowledge and to stimulate discussions that may move beyond general perceptions of gender relations in the field of development. We argue that students seem to struggle with transferring such experience-based knowledge into overall discussions and thus also struggle with escaping the confines of dominant narratives. Through examples from the course, we reflect on the use of experience notes in teaching gender, the strengths and weaknesses of a team based approach to teaching gender and diversity, as well as on our own positioning as lecturers in the field of gender and development.

KEYWORDS

*gender, diversity, team-based learning, online teaching, comparative reflection/
kon, diversitet, holdbaseret læring, onlineundervisning, komparativ refleksion*

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E-learning is increasingly embraced as a basis for teaching in higher education institutions. The application of information technology creates new opportunities for learning through a different didactic approach (Beldarrain 2006; Bryant 2006), where a combination of innovative pedagogical practices and an e-learning environment may foster relational and contextual learning (Knowles 2002). E-learning allows for virtual teams and provides new groups of students access to higher education in foreign universities without having to travel. For development studies this is an important aspect in itself. Moreover, it allows for cross-cultural student groups enriching the learning processes and potentially stimulating critical debate across cultures and within topics. This is particularly the case when a team based learning (TBL) approach is applied.

The cultural diversity within the student group and the potential for a TBL approach was central for the design of a master's course on gender, culture and everyday life (GCEL), part of a master programme in *Development Management* (DM) at the University of Agder in Norway. The master programme is an e-learning programme with a heterogeneous student group coming from Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. In our course we wanted to stimulate critical reflections around mainstream discourses on gender and development. This was triggered by two factors: (1) as educators we were frustrated with our undergraduate students reproducing simplified narratives of women in the global South merely as victims and marginalized. Despite efforts to present students with ideas of cultural diversity and complexity we often ended up with students reproducing received wisdom (Leach and Mearns 1996). (2) As researchers we had through our research experienced more complex situations with reference to gender

and development than what current policy debates and development practices tend to rest on (Haaland 2008; Wallevik 2012). We wanted to ensure that students gain a wider understanding of gender and development, acknowledging cultural diversity and situated knowledge in everyday life experiences. Such an approach is needed if we want students to critically engage with mainstream understandings of gender in development research as well as practice.

Even though gender deals with the social relationship between women and men, there is a bias that the individual in focus almost always is a woman. The Gender and Development perspective (GAD) in theory provided a space for men and masculinities, yet attempts to bring men back into the debate have proved difficult (Jones 2006; Chant & Gutman 2002; Cornwall & White 2000). Consequently, in current gender and development debates women continue to be the focus. The primary focus is on gender equality, but mainly through strengthening women's individual positions and women's rights, highlighting for example economic independence for the individual as an important way to empower women (Kaber 2005). A challenge in mainstream debates is that there is not sufficient recognition of the importance of context and intersectionality. Class, caste and age often seem to have been taken out of the more generalised equation (Win 2007; Chant 2006; Whitehead et al. 2008).

In this article we discuss experiences of teaching gender and diversity in an online MA course applying a TBL approach. The overall question is how to enable students to engage more critically with dominant gender and development debates through an understanding of experience-based knowledge. In the following we first describe core elements of TBL and how we have accommodated TBL to online teaching. We proceed with a general overview of

the course modules and main ideas. We then provide examples of how experience notes, i.e. everyday stories reflecting a situation where the students experienced being gendered (Widerberg 1998), provided an interesting path for the students to understand some of the complexities of gender and development. We discuss challenges of making students reflect upon how everyday life situations and embodied and situated knowledge can be used to discuss and question mainstream theories of gender and development. Furthermore, we reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of TBL to accomplish this task and on our own positioning when trying to teach diversity in the field of gender and development.

TEACHING GENDER AND DIVERSITY THROUGH TBL

In the following we link the essential elements of TBL to our course using Michaelsen and Sweet (2008) as the point of departure. An overall learning objective of TBL is to provide students with conceptual as well as procedural knowledge, moving beyond merely covering content (Michaelsen & Sweet 2008). Core to the approach is that students must learn to apply concepts to solve problems while engaging in debates. Four essential elements of TBL should be present for successful learning; a good group composition, student accountability of work, feedback to students on their work, and finally, group assignments that promote learning as well as elements of team development.

In a TBL course, instructors should oversee group formation. Groups should remain stable and be as diverse as possible as the process of collaborative knowledge building becomes particularly interesting to watch when group members bring many different perspectives to a task (Michaelsen & Sweet 2008). In our course, the students study online, but are brought together in a two weeks face-to-face session at the very

beginning of their programme. In this period, emphasis is placed on the social dynamics and interaction between students to facilitate their online work. During the face-to-face sessions, students start to work in groups and continue their group work online. This perhaps reflects the first two steps of Salmon's model on e-learning (2000), where students familiarise themselves with the way of working and get to know each other. Then, for 10 months they are only interacting online, until they meet again for a second face-to-face session lasting a month. When GCEL starts during the second semester the students are already placed into groups of four to seven students reflecting a variety in cultural background, gender, and previous experiences. Students are given their assignments in the virtual class-room (Frontier), which allow for debate-based learning experiences through discussions and through writing texts.

Accountability is fundamental when we discuss cooperative or collaborative learning (Dillenbourg 1996; Slavin 1983) as students are not only accountable to the course instructors but, equally important to their fellow students in terms of the quality and quantity of their work (Michaelsen & Sweet 2008). In GCEL a large part of the assignments are group assignments where the group's effort results in a joint, graded product. Each assignment starts with readings where the students need to prepare themselves in order to engage in the joint discussions. For each assignment one student assumes the responsibility of being a weaver: the person that ensures that the arguments are presented in a coherent manner in the final text resulting from the discussions.

Frequent immediate student feedback is another core aspect of TBL. Feedback is essential to learning and important for the group dynamics (Michaelsen & Sweet 2008). In line with Cress and Kimmerle (2008), we presuppose that a person's indi-

vidual knowledge can serve as a resource for other people's learning (see also Kafai 2006). When we apply the TBL approach, the idea is that students should learn much from each other and that their work together will progress as part of being a group. We provide feedback through a course tutor and course instructors. The tutor follows the online discussions on a daily basis and is familiar with the core content and curriculum. The course instructors have the overall academic responsibility and enter more into discussions of content through feedback on group assignments and individual hand-ins. The course instructors also follow the discussions closely and oversee that groups are progressing in their discussions. Finding common ground within the groups is important, which leads to the last element in TBL to be discussed: the good assignment

A good assignment will not only stimulate learning for the students, but also ensure a real group interaction (Michaelsen & Sweet 2008). This is a difficult task since group work online, where students do not discuss face-to-face, may end up in lengthy written text referring to the readings without really discussing the content. The TBL literature argues a difference between assignments that emphasise decision-making versus assignments which require lengthy text production as the latter do not necessarily foster good team development since texts often are based on individual inputs (Michaelsen & Sweet 2008). According to Dillenbourg et al. (1996) this way of organising team work takes on a form of co-operation on tasks where each person is responsible for a portion, and does not foster collaborative learning which would include mutual engagement in a coordinated effort (Dillenborough et al. 1996: 2).

In our course we see a combination of working methods. For the discussions we often see a coordinated effort through collaboration on the tasks to be solved. How-

ever, when writing up assignments students seem to more or less divide tasks between themselves. As a result, they produce individual arguments for a final text put together by a weaver. Following the terminology of Dillenbourg et al. (1996), this approach reflects more of a coordinated effort rather than a collaborative one. The students seem to prefer this combined way of working at least in the production of a first draft. The discussions beforehand are more interactional and so are the discussions leading to the final text even though the work sometimes is divided between them. Cress and Kimmerle (2008) argue that with the use of Wikis students can actively collaborate also on producing texts. How the students work outside Fronter is out of our sight. Some students might use Google Documents or Wiki in their process of developing a final product. Our experience is that the groups are dynamic in their work, emphasizing how decisions are taken as a group, and even though some individuals are taking the lead it seems they are working purposefully as a team where they all are responsible.

GENDER, CULTURE AND EVERYDAY LIFE: COURSE CONTENT AND DESIGN

The GCEL course is divided into four modules and designed on the basis of a study guide. The study guide provides the students with literature to read for each module as well as assignments; either as online discussions or essay hand-ins. The intention is to build knowledge step by step and to approach different aspects of the gender and development discourses and policies. The initial module has a broad approach and introduces students to some of the guiding narratives of the gender and development discourse. We then introduce critical readings on gender and development. Based on the literature, the students discuss in groups and continue to write a paper based on the literature they've read. The group

dynamics evolve rapidly in this first module and members take on different roles.

The second module focuses on femininity and masculinity, highlighting cultural constructions of gender. After initial readings the students are challenged to write experience notes. These are supposed to be short stories from their everyday lives reflecting an experience of being gendered. The stories are uploaded, read, and discussed within the group. This exercise provides an opportunity to understand the importance of context and culture in gendering processes. Whilst discussing their various experiences the students are told to change the gender of their stories, which allows for further reflections on the cultural construction of gender. We then screen the anthropological film *Les Mairuuwas, The masters of water* (Waage 2014) focusing on male migrants in Cameroon. Through the film we want the students to critically engage with the dominant idea of marginalized women in development. Both exercises stimulate interesting discussions on diversity in the cross-cultural groups, from which we will provide specific examples later on in the text.

The aspect of everyday life is core in the third module, which starts with a discussion about micro finance (MF) and gender. Based on two newspaper articles representing opposing views on MF, students are expected to engage in both perspectives and discuss accordingly. As part of this module the students chose a theme for a paper from a list of given topics. By now the students should be able to apply everyday life examples when discussing a particular situation and, as such, also more critically engage with existing theory or knowledge in the field. In the fourth and final module students are to revisit the theory-practice encounter. In their final group work they are to write a policy brief; formulate academic thinking into policy discussions.

GRASPING COMPLEXITY THROUGH EXPERIENCE NOTES

In the course we wanted to allow for complex understandings and discussions of gender, incorporating an acknowledgement of embodied knowledge and utilising the cultural diversity of the student groups as a resource. The Norwegian sociologist Karin Widerberg and her approach to teaching gender through experience notes inspired us. For gender to become a personal and political issue and not only an intellectual one, Widerberg (1998) addresses the gap between theoretically advanced texts and the lives of the students themselves. She argues that in order to engage the students, we need to teach them that gender is something relevant to them and their everyday lives – and not just a dimension of other people's lives:

“If they can't read their own gender experience into the concepts handed to them, these will of course not be tools that they can use to understand their lives and their societies” (1998: 4).

The idea of experience notes is in line with one of the core elements of TBL: to move beyond a mere understanding of content, towards an application of concepts for problem solving (Michaelsen & Sweet 2008). To get students to reflect upon gender as relevant to them, she makes use of experience notes. For our course, we adopted the task given by Widerberg to her own students of gender:

“to describe concretely a situation – today, yesterday or in the near past – when you felt/experienced/were made aware of being a man/ woman” (1998: 6).

We wanted the students to reflect upon their own experiences in a gendered situation and then to further reflect in the group upon how gender is culturally constructed. Moreover, through the experience

notes and the cultural differences inherent in the group compositions, we wanted to create increased awareness of embodied knowledge and the importance of everyday life situations, and thus also to enable students to more critically interact with dominant, generalised theories.

Most of the texts produced by the students had some element of cultural norms and expectations of what it means to be a man or a woman in the specific culture, showing the differences across the cultural spectrum in our groups. Many of the students wrote up experience notes based on their experience of meeting 'the other'. Norwegian female students often used examples on how they experience being a woman when travelling around visiting different countries of the South, often emphasising their role of women related to that of men:

"I am currently living in a Latin American country, where the macho culture is very visible, so I do in fact feel that I am being made aware of being a woman almost every day..."

Norwegian students needed to get out of Norway in order to find an experience to write about, as if they become gendered only when in a different place. Thus, reflections on gender and gendering processes come as a result of the contrasts and differences experienced. Many of the stories of students from the South were equally linked to their experience of being in Norway. The following experience note written by Nelson serves as a good illustration:

"Moving to Norway from Uganda last year has helped change my worldview with regards to gender roles and expectations that come with being a man in a 'woman's world'. Sometime in November last year, I was offered the opportunity to shift jobs from a cleaner to work part-time as a waiter at an Asian restaurant in town. Being the typical Ugandan/African male that I am, I hesitated to take

up the new job opening because I felt it would bring out the 'woman' in me. After weighing the options available to me, I accepted the job offer, with my decision shaped mainly by two reasons: the context in which I found myself and the presence of other males in my new work environment. I must admit that it would never have given thought to working as a waiter in my home country because largely gender roles are shaped by existing cultural norms and values. In most communities at home hardly would you find a man in the kitchen, either doing dishes or serving food. The change of context therefore allowed me to work as a waiter without being subjected to ridicule by friends and community members. In addition, the presence of other male colleague waiters helped calm nerves and gave me much needed confidence to go about my duties because if they could do it, so could I also."

Nelson reflected on how he is gendered in his own context through comparison with a Norwegian context. This comparative reflection stimulated discussions on the importance of culture and context for the construction of gender roles as well as its enacting in everyday lives even in cross cultural contexts. When Nelson took his personal experience as a starting point, he invited his fellow group members to reflect on cultural diversity, and he invited people into his experiences, working with the concept of gender in a different manner – filling the concept with contextual and embodied meaning. During the discussion which followed, group members agreed on the importance of acknowledging cultural diversity when discussing gender, and pointed to this when they looked for common themes arising from their different experience notes.

Through this way of acknowledging situated knowledge the group members became aware of the importance of filling concepts with meaning based on lived realities. They became increasingly aware of

how embodied knowledge differs from a theoretical approach and what this means for knowledge generation. In particular Nelson reflected on the importance of experience based knowledge when discussing overall themes. When he engaged in a discussion on how the women or girls are in focus both in research and practice, he argued:

“From personal experience I have witnessed instances of injustices to males, not necessarily by females but through educational policy deliberately enacted to favor women where several scholarships, food rations, textbooks, and other incentives have been provided to push girl education. Instead of creating gender parity, in my opinion this contributes to tipping the balance... I feel there is too much focus on negative aspects and that feminists sometimes ignore recent social changes. For instance, feminists often portray women as ‘passive victims’, as if they are unable to act against discrimination. There are however available avenues to seek redress in the face of perceived injustices on the basis of gender.”

Other groups were also engaged in this kind of discussions on how to translate experience-based knowledge into gender and development debates. Cultural diversity based on the experiences both within a given country and across the North/South span was discussed. Thus, embodied and situated knowledge was acknowledged and used when the students were solving the tasks given within this module, when engaging in theoretical discussions on gender as well as in discussions on policy interventions.

We found that many of the students that came forward as theoretically strong in the first module seemed to struggle more with this second module, providing space for those who assumed a supportive role in the first. Students with a strong interest in theory are thinking in more abstract terms and like to discuss gender conceptually. Students with an interest in everyday life

practices and situated knowledge may experience difficulties translating this knowledge into a more generalized theoretical debate (Widerberg 1998). Through a TBL approach group members learn from each other and see how they best can participate and further strengthen the groups and the dynamics. In our case, particularly the theoretically strong students found it difficult to link the experience notes to their daily life. Still, they often revealed an excellent ability to analyze the accounts of their fellow students. This was the case with Maria who responded to other’s stories with a high level of comparative reflection. She was also one of the first to grasp our intention of making students change the gender in the experience:

“It becomes clearer whose narrative or voice it is, because the experiences now sound strange and out of place... *men* are jogging in the streets even during night time, or that *sisters* or *mothers* have to accompany *boys* when they go out due to safety issues. It does not add up with what we are expecting to hear when discussing gender inequality! It gives us a picture of how we have become so used to thinking of women as subordinated or the victims of gender inequality, that if we change women with men we immediately think the experience description becomes strange.”

Maria spurred a discussion linking theory to everyday life experiences through accessing her fellow students’ stories. As such, the use of experience notes not only brought about discussions on cultural diversity in terms of cultural differences between nations and the importance of context. But discussions on how to transform this type of knowledge into gender and development debates were also evoked. Through group work students learned that the theoretical and the empirical point of entry to discussions about gender are two very different ways of gaining and using knowledge. Even though students perhaps found themselves

at different stages in the learning process (Salmon 2000), they started the process of mastering both academic and practical qualities and discussing how different knowledge is constructed and put into use through learning from each other (Cress & Kimberle 2008).

According to Widerberg (1998), the task of writing experience notes works best when students are concrete and personal; if not, we end up with abstract descriptions which do not trigger discussions with a comparative reflection. Some of the students struggled to write something about themselves based on a particular situation. As a result, some of them described quite general situations from which they started to discuss similarities across national cultures. Martin was one of them:

“I found writing this experience note extremely difficult. Even though, I live in Malaysia, which could be described as a patriarchy. I live in one of the more liberal cities. In my day-to-day activities, I do not feel there is a big difference between my female friends and myself. Of course, there are pockets of social groups where men and women are expected to behave a certain way (especially among the more religious), but in the social groups that I take part in – I found it really hard to identify an experience relating to my manhood. Nevertheless, I found it, in one of the most trivial tasks. I ride the motorbike daily in Malaysia, and I realized almost exclusively if I would ride with a girl I would be the driver – even if the motorbike did not belong to me. This also seems to be the general idea – as I can count the times I have seen a woman in the front with a man in the back. Even with foreigners this trend seems to persist, even in Norway. So this I guess is my “global” experience of manhood, which it is expected that men should be in front when driving a motorbike. Come to think of it, this seems also to be the norm when it comes to driving cars.”

As the first student to present his experience notes in the group, Martin’s text influenced the direction of the discussions in his group. His fellow students agreed with his observations, supported by similar experiences from different contexts. As a result, the experience notes in this particular group triggered discussions about similarities across cultures, finding common ground rather than exploring cultural diversity. Martin’s story could however have triggered a discussion on how gender intersects with age and class, since his story also touches upon his belonging to a particular social group. However, the students did not touch upon how similarity can be the result of other important categories intersecting with gender roles and gender relations, such as for instance social class and age.

Not all students ignored these categories. In Maria’s group, class surged as a point of discussion following the experience notes. When Maria responded to her fellow student’s comment on how “women are always considered as men’s servant or slave in the lower economy family – even in some middle class family,” she asked:

“... you imply that gender inequality is stronger among the lower educated and lower class groups in India and Nepal. Does that mean that there is less of it among the higher educated or higher class, that somehow education and a better economy changes gender attitudes?”

Her question inspired further discussion on social class, which was acknowledged by the participants as an important category for understanding gender (in)equality. Some other groups discussed differences across a North-South span by referring to Mohanty’s critique (1991a and 1991b) of how Western feminisms’ understanding of Third World Women fail because gender is seen as detached from social organisation and differentiation. The few attempts at discussions on class were limited to the ex-

perience notes and in the following modules students were unable to bring in the question of social differentiation. The students did not demonstrate any reflexivity in terms of discussing their own experiences and positioning through the lens of social class and age. Furthermore, as course instructors we failed to stimulate this discussion further.

MORE THAN CULTURE: EXPLORING DIVERSITY IN HOMOGENOUS GROUPS

In retrospect we are aware of how our student groups were culturally diverse in terms of their countries of origin, but perhaps more homogenous in terms of social class. The majority of our students, we could argue, belong to one social group: the global middle class – or at least they aspire to situate themselves as members of such a class. Of course we acknowledge that there are differences across cultures, however the students who follow the MA programme share some common characteristics of a mobile, post-national middle class who are operating on a global scale (Ball & Nikita 2014). As such, there was less diversity in terms of class culture within the group that could encourage debate or allow for diverging perspectives. Equally, the students themselves were not sufficiently conscious of the social class that they represent and how this had impacted on their discussions. That the students can be seen as wanting to aspire to become part of an educated middle class also implies they are potentially submerged into a discourse where Western ideas of gender relations are used as benchmark. This does not mean that they are not aware of the difficulties of generalising about gender across a North-South span. However, students from both Norway and the Global South speak of gender equality as the deal which all other experience is compared to. Even though we aimed at opening up for discussions on the gap between ideals and practices where everyday

life of group members could shed light on a generalised ideal, Western ideas of gender relations where equality is advocated and women's economic independencies a core point seem to have become part of what Leach and Mearns (1996) refer to as received wisdom: an idea held as correct by social consensus or by the establishment; in this particular case a global middle class.

The way that the students are submerged in a Western approach to gender becomes particularly evident when they watch the anthropological movie *Les Mairuwas, The masters of water*. The film portrays four immigrant men in Cameroon, earning their income as water carriers in an urban, Muslim setting. The film follows the four men in their everyday life, showing in detail their work and providing insight into the social and cultural context in which the men are situated. When discussing gender roles in the film, the students focused on how context defines gender roles, for instance by commenting how the men can carry out this type of job only being out of their regular context, since water collection often is a woman's job. Despite this good observation most of the students moved on into a common narrative of how most societies are male dominated. Nelson commented:

“From the film I deduced that the society depicted is a man's world, with the male voice and occupation being dominant. Women are thus relegated to a supporting role of housekeepers, with men being pre-dominantly the breadwinners.”

Cristina had a similar approach:

“It tells a story about a strong man's world, where the voices of men are heard and where they dominate. The women, however, are seen to have role of housekeepers, where women take care of households and chores.”

By assuming the narrative about women as marginalized and men as breadwinners, the

students failed to see that the water carriers enable women in this society to remain indoors yet at the same time earning an income through renting out water carriers to the immigrant men. As such, the film describes relationships between men and women assuming a patron-client relationship, but where the male migrants are the clients, something which turns established ideas of men dominating women completely around. When the students were to discuss the gender dimension in the film they failed to grasp how it challenges the ideas of women being a marginalized group. Because they did not see the patron-client relationships they did not enter into any discussions on social organization where social class and age could have been in focus. The discussions lacked the contextualized elements that were part of their discussions about the experience notes. Instead of seeing the individual everyday life of the male protagonists, students were somehow institutionally captured by the narrative of the poor man trying to live up to the ideal of being the breadwinner. They discussed what they perceived to be the absence of women in a patriarchal society and argued that women seemed to be dependent and that they needed independence.

We assumed that the work on experiences could help the students move beyond mainstream discourse and critically engage with ideas about gender in different contexts. Our screening of the anthropological film was intended to stimulate this type of discussions. However, we found the students remaining within more generalized narratives. The same seemed to repeat itself when students were challenged to discuss everyday life experiences vs. the dominant narrative by reflecting on two articles presenting pros and cons of micro finance. After some initial discussions we as course instructors challenged them to look beyond the generalized narratives posting comments such as the following:

“What about moving away from the individualized self-help regime and into working more towards improving overall structures? What do you think? The microfinance debates are closely linked to the gender and development debates often emphasizing empowerment and financial independence. Could there be other ways? Could we turn the mirror? Is access to a loan where women are supposed to start up an entrepreneurial activity necessarily empowerment? Or is it a burden to be left alone with the responsibility? Are you all entrepreneurs?”

The informal discussions that followed provided insightful reflections on MF and examples from the student's own countries, reflecting on the theme from more than one angle. However, when they later were to write a paper, the end product was once more captured by a general discourse where women were seen as victims or that their possibilities for development were culturally constrained. Thus, our students produced theoretically well-argued papers using cases underlining their main arguments, yet their personal experiences and the knowledge gained through more informal discussions were left out. This reflects perhaps an overall challenge of communicating complex realities into hegemonic discourses.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For our course we aimed to stimulate new discussions about gender in a development context by including a strong focus on everyday life and culture. By teaching the course online we had an environment which allowed for groups with more social and cultural diversity than what is often the case in the average Norwegian lecture room. Students were in a learning context allowing for engagement across social, economic, and cultural differences (Comerford 2005), potentially opening for a more nuanced understanding of how gender is socially and culturally constituted.

Through study guides and feedback we were able to stimulate an increased awareness on cultural complexity. The fact that we did not sufficiently acknowledge the importance of social class and age group as homogenising factors in our TBL approach created a feeling of shortcoming with reference to our overall idea of diversity influencing learning. Opening for more flexibility in group composition, i.e. with groups shifting throughout the course, could have stimulated some other types of discussions. We could also have challenged the students more in reflections on their own social groups and social class culture. The fact that all of the groups represented cultural differences, but not so much variance in age and social class, meant that the experience notes did not stimulate vast differences across lived experience and embodied knowledge. Rather, it equally stimulated discussions of sameness followed by students unconsciously locating themselves within mainstream discourse. Somehow the knowledge gained within module two, which emphasized the personal experiences of gendering processes, remained within this module, and we were not able to bring these discussions into the next modules. Hence our main impression when completing the course was that despite our efforts to acknowledge context, social organization, and diversity, students continued to embrace the dominant discourses. The discussion should not be limited to an idea about sameness and homogeneity in terms of age and class within the groups. Even though it is beyond the scope of this particular article to delve into a discussion on belief and the time needed to change beliefs, some reflection is needed on the time set aside for students to go beyond their prior ideas about gender and development and challenge their ways of thinking and this reflection would have to include us as teachers as well (Nespor 1987; Pajares 1992). It is very interesting that many students found it easier to identify by gender

when they were out of their usual context. Such a decontextualisation was perhaps necessary in order for the students to see gender differences, which were too tacit within own cultural settings. Such an exposure to difference could be a starting point for a change in thinking, but maybe the exposure to difference was too limited in time for us to expect students to develop their thinking along the lines of diversity. Our belief was that this could be accomplished through a TBL approach where the groups were culturally diverse. Through the writing of experience notes we aimed at disturbing generalized narratives and hoped for an 'awakening'. In the process we were perhaps forgetting how much time it takes to challenge own beliefs and go beyond the taken-for-granted.

Furthermore, teaching online demands a close follow-up of students (Salmon 2000). Upon reflection, we as teachers relied perhaps too much on the group dynamics where the underpinning belief was that struggling within the group and learning from each other was a good way of grasping knowledge. A closer interaction with the students during the phase of transferring situated and embodied knowledge into more theoretical discussions should have been considered, especially since students during this phase probably found themselves at different stages of their learning process (Salmon 2000). Another important consideration here regards literature. A greater exposure to anthropological writings could have enhanced students' understanding on how to relate lived life to theoretical debates.

We also have to reflect upon our own positioning within the field with reference to the question on how to enable students to more critically engage with dominant discourses. The study guide reflected this aim of leading students through the modules towards an experience of diversity and gender as culturally constructed. Since we became so enmeshed in the idea of grasping

complexity through the use of experience notes we were also somehow blinded. Considering how we wanted students to engage critically with mainstream discourse, it ironically meant that we as educators were also trapped in our own approach and failed to see potential limitations. As much as we wanted to widen the scope of their learning, we also limited this widening by our own ideas about the importance of alternative perspectives when teaching gender and development. We also missed out on the construction of gender on-going in the virtual global classroom, reflecting perhaps a construction of gender within parts of an educated global middle class. A closer look at the ‘construction of self’ on the part of the individuals participating could provide useful insights to explain why students aim to find common ground rather than search for diversity. These are issues that will demand further exploration.

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