

THE LEVEL OF CULTURAL SENSITIVITY OF THE HUMANITIES 1 CLASSES ON A FILM CONTENT DISCUSSION

Blessa Kay F. Caballero, Ph.D.
Mindanao State University
Marawi City
fuerzas_blessakay@yahoo.com

Abstract: Teaching for diversity is enjoying emphasis in university environments. In the heat of intellectual encounters, religious or other sensibilities could be offended. Classroom discourse could lead in other directions such as perceived attacks against a certain faith. As a social laboratory, the Mindanao State University—being the locale of this study, offers itself as a site of struggle for competing discourses. Thus, this study aims at knowing what is the general level of cultural sensitivity of these Humanities 1 classes of the said university in terms of 1) promoting freedom of expression, 2) crippling family and social issues, 3) expressing truthfulness and equality, 4) channeling classroom tension towards creativity, 5) fostering unity in diversity and 6) growing through cultural accountability. These students were asked to view a film. As the discussion went through, the levels of cultural sensitivity were rated. Twenty questions were grouped according to the six themes. In conclusion, classroom ratings suggest that classroom discussions are susceptible to clashes when students' cultures are offended. There seem to be a modicum of discourse about respect, tolerance, love and other virtues as a relative thing that is depending on the culture of the people involved. The classes showed varied results in dealing with the growing cultural accountability, ranging from 'highly a characteristic' to a 'more likely a characteristic' of the discussion.

INTRODUCTION

The arena of teaching language and literature in the past three decades has been crowded with such key concepts and watchwords like multicultural education, cross cultural studies, bilingual education, cultural competence or literacy, cultural awareness, and cultural diversity. Diversity, particularly, often creeps up in the rhetoric of bilingual education. Once thought as a curse or punishment according to tradition such as the building of Nimrod's Tower of Babel, diversity is increasingly recognized not only as a God-given condition of the human community, but as a societal asset or desideratum. Although there remain pockets of resistance to diversity and heterogeneity as the accepted norm, and movements to promote the dominant mainstream culture as the more effective strategy for advancing national character and unity, these are fringe protests against the rising tide of cultural diversity advocacy.

In language, communication and literature classrooms, the teacher who controls the choice of materials and the direction of class discourse is vulnerable to abuse of authority. In the heat of intellectual encounters, religious or some other sensibilities could be offended. Classroom discourse could lead in other directions—i.e. perceived attacks against a certain faith leads to a narrow interpretation of the text under consideration. For example, some Hindu or Islamic beliefs and practices may strike students from other cultural or religious backgrounds as too exotic and rigid. The discussion of potentially controversial topics could touch off a full-blown conflict in the classroom.

The issue of diversity is important in the University setting because the average 18-22 year old is in a stage of development where cultural and value orientation is being established. For the first time, these students find themselves in an environment where they must form opinions on a wide range of topics—sexual orientation, violence against women and children and other gender issues, political, moral and religious controversies—without worrying about what their elders will say. The university is the first place where they encounter people from diverse backgrounds, and where they leave their habitual groups behind. The university environment gives them the opportunity to explore ideas, and as has been observed, most students react well when they have the chance to examine and re-evaluate the opinions with which they grew up, and to develop themselves independently.

Instructional practices exert tremendous influence upon the students' intellectual and even moral-spiritual growth. The goal of a college education places an enormous responsibility on the faculty. This, however, begs the questions: Are teachers aware of the power they yield? Do they recognize how their hidden personal assumptions may insidiously slant to give their choice of materials and the direction of discourse such as what happened in the class of the literature teacher who declared the text anti-Islamic? Do they have enough cultural knowledge or awareness to steer discussion away from potentially explosive areas, or to avoid gaffes,

jokes, or commentaries that offend or demean a particular group? Do the teacher's choice of reading materials and way of structuring the class create or promote a particular ideology—e.g. Leftist or Communist—or propagate/favor a certain religion over others? As Felder and Silverman (1988) point out, any choice of materials presupposes the exclusion of other materials and any organization of the selected materials into a coherent syllabus involves decisions about which elements, topics, or themes to emphasize. The teacher's assumptions or perspective always finds a way of insinuating itself into the syllabus or instructional activities. There have been unverified reports about certain teachers 'proselytizing' or 'evangelizing' in class, and of others' strident denunciations of the status quo and oracular pronouncements of the victory of the people's struggle.

As a social laboratory—a testing ground for tolerance, accommodation, acculturation, and exercise in cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity—the Mindanao State University offers itself as a site of struggle for competing discourses, or a model of a kind of pluralist society built upon the unity-in-diversity idea. It has a mission to lead in the celebration of the rich diversity of human community and in the promotion of an education that builds bridges across cultures and traditions, toward a world of mutual respect and sharing, and broader understanding.

Statement of the Problem

Whatever progress the University has been making on the above-described front needs monitoring and appraisal, considering the intricacy and delicateness of the process that is responsible for modeling and guiding—the growing awareness of students toward tolerance for, acceptance and appreciation of diversity, greater cultural sensitivity and understanding. An inquiry of this kind is not only timely, but long overdue, in fact. It addresses an urgent and ever-present need in a pluralist, multi-ethnic and multicultural setting. This study sought answers to this question: *Regarding cultural sensitivity, what is generally the level of cultural sensitivity of the Humanities 1 Classes?*

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on James Banks' Dimension of Multicultural Education. Multicultural education is more than a change in the curriculum. As James Banks (1994) has pointed out to make education appropriate for all students, it is important to consider other dimensions as well. The way the athletics and counseling programs are structured, the teaching method used, lessons about prejudice, perspectives on knowledge—these and many more elements contribute to true multicultural education. The dependent variable is the level of sensitivity manifest in the classes involved in the study. How cultural diversity could be accommodated in a classroom being a focal point of interest in this inquiry, the culture(s) of the learners counted as an important variable. The cultural characteristics of a particular classroom should provide the measure for deciding how instructional techniques should be altered for ethnically diverse students.

Once cultural diversity is established as a reality in the classroom, an elicitor—the movie—shows how cultural diversity in a classroom creates challenges and difficulties for the students and the teacher and how the teacher responds with an appropriate intervention strategy to address the problem. The movie serves as a stimulus that directs and rivets students attention to the issue of cultural diversity.

In this study, there are several factors, which are encapsulated in the rating sheet used in this study. The Rating Sheet is an important tool that would determine the level of cultural sensitivity manifest in the classroom discussion. With the theories that comprise the backbone of this study serving as prompters, the researcher has come up with situations to be rated. These situations are clustered into six, namely:

- a. promoting freedom of expression;
- b. crippling family and societal issues;
- c. expressing truthfulness and equality;
- d. channeling classroom tension towards creativity;
- e. fostering unity in diversity; and
- f. growing through cultural accountability

Research Design

This study was primarily designed to see the general level of cultural sensitivity of the Humanities 1 classes in terms of the following clusters: promoting freedom of expression; crippling family and societal issues, expressing truthfulness and equality, channeling classroom tension towards creativity, fostering unity in diversity, and growing through cultural accountability.

This study was conducted at the Mindanao State University Main Campus in Marawi City. The University makes an ideal locale of the study on account of its multicultural or diverse student population. Since its inception, it has been operating as a social laboratory. Specifically, the study had for its population or universe the Humanities 1 classes during the 2nd Semester of School Year 2007-2008. Five Humanities 1 classes handled by different instructors participated in the study.

The design employed in this study is a combination of the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Research instruments utilized in gathering the data for this study are the following: Humanities 1 Survey Questionnaire, Rating Sheet, and Interview Question. The combination of these data gathering methods ensured validity through triangulation. These instruments proved very useful in obtaining the needed data to support the thesis of this study. Efficiency and accuracy in gathering the data were the prime considerations.

The flow of the discussion was videoed from one angle only since the video camera should remain hidden from the students and the instructor. Aside from the video camera, a tape recorder was also used for the transcription of the flow of classroom discussion and during the interview. Although the use of the aforementioned instruments marks or guarantees a high degree of reliability, there is a possibility of data overload and the presence of machine being put-off.

In this study, the respondents did not analyze the film in terms of its technical features. Its cinematography was not evaluated. Instead, only the core content or film message and how it elicited the cultural aspects among learners were discussed during the rating. Only the level of cultural sensitivity of the classroom discussion was discussed.

Results and Findings

In evaluating film content discussion in the culturally diverse Humanities 1 classes for the second semester, AY 2007-2008, three raters observed five Humanities 1 classes. There are 20 questions in the rating sheet. The 20 questions, though ordered and sequenced not according to proximity of themes, are grouped into six clusters: (1) promoting freedom of expression; (2) crippling family and societal issues; (3) expressing truthfulness and equality; (4) channeling classroom tension towards creativity; (5) fostering unity in diversity; and (6) growing through cultural accountability. There were four levels of rating the classroom, namely:

- 1= never a characteristic of the classroom discussion;
- 2= likely a characteristic of the classroom discussion;
- 3= more likely a characteristic of the classroom discussion; and
- 4=highly a characteristic of the classroom discussion

THE SIX CLUSTERS

CLUSTER 1: Promoting Freedom of Expression

Question1.The classroom discussion encourages students to participate openly in the class discussion.

Question2.The classroom discussion encourages students to listen and value comments.

Question3.The classroom discussion allows students to voice out their feelings when their culture is offended.

With its emphasis on richness and strength through variety, cultural diversity has been widely and enthusiastically endorsed and celebrated in western countries and now in the Philippines. Awareness of different cultural norms and sensitivity to the needs and concerns of people is the primary concern. Such concern is addressed if all of the students are given the chance to express their own selves and are free to represent their own culture.

To express oneself in a class filled with classmates of different cultures and religions, beliefs and experiences, is a great challenge to anyone who feels that his culture is at risk. Whatever the case, these students need to be encouraged to participate freely in the discussion without feeling that their culture is superior to, or below the others'. Each comment made by a student is something to be valued because within that comment is embedded a string of beliefs, and cognitive values that had been built into the student's schema over a period of time.

When a particular culture is offended, these students who represent that culture must be given the chance to speak up and voice out their feelings. They must be able to feel the objective and unbiased support of the teacher who is an authority in the classroom. They must know that unjust and unpleasant things can be changed. This support can be manifested by enabling the students involved to build a healthy self-identity and empowering them to resist bias.

Generally, there is a small chance that the Humanities 1 classes do not highly promote freedom of expression. There is, within the class, a trace of resistance to speak up because of the fear of being laughed at or ridiculed. Schumann names this language ego, one of the psychological or affective factors that could hinder acculturation, the *sine qua non*, for acquiring the target language. In one of the classrooms rated, a student become reticent and showed great reluctance to stand up when asked about the conflict she had experienced because of cultural differences. She was afraid because that conflict involved a student whose culture is represented by the majority in that particular class. She had serious reservations about revisiting that experience and rekindling a similar conflict by provoking strong reactions from members of the class. She considered avoidance or evasiveness as a safe position, that is, the most appropriate communication strategy.

CLUSTER 2: **Crippling Family and Societal Issues**

- Question4. The classroom discussion allows students to voice out or talk about their own experiences as influenced by their social identity and cultural background.
- Question5. The classroom discussion talks about respect, tolerance, love and other virtues as a relative thing depending on the culture of the people involved.
- Question19. The classroom discussion reveals an awareness of cultural misrepresentation of any group found in the movie.

There are various ways in which the family impinges on school readiness. They include, but are not limited to, the home environment, style of parent-child interaction, and family's attitudes toward school and learning. Parents who provide an array of enriching cultural and social experiences during preschool and early elementary school years have children who perform better on achievement tests and are rated as more task oriented by their teachers (Bradley et.al, 1988).

Cluster 2 pertains to crippling family and societal issues. The fourth question is concerned with allowing students to voice out or talk about their own experiences as influenced by their social identity and cultural background. It was found out that the Humanities 1 classes are highly characterized by this kind of situation. Generally, among the five classrooms observed, it turned out that these classes belong to scale number two, which means the feature or situation is just likely a characteristic of the classes involved. This is low on the scale. In other words, these classes almost never talk about respect, tolerance, love, and other virtues as a relative thing.

However, this does not indicate a poor showing, or considerable ambiguity and uncertainty. It should not be taken to mean that these students never really talk about respect, tolerance, love, and other virtues. Perhaps they did but they talked about it as not relative concerns but as universal virtues and they tried to attach legalism to these based on their family and societal influence.

This crippling family and societal influence is clearly seen in the subtle and understated description of the Humanities 1 classrooms. Although, the result of the rating reveals that the items under Cluster 2 are more likely characteristic of the classrooms observed, the message clearly shows that the way the family raised the children and the kind of environment affect the way students interact inside the classroom. This is felt in the dynamics of classroom discourse.

For example, one student in Humanities 1 was observed, during the classroom discussion, to be very aggressive in presenting her ideas. She always had something to say on every issue raised in the class; in other words, she was assertive, vocal, or outspoken and self-confident. She reacted positively to criticism and always considered the points of other students.

Another example was this student who, as his demographic profile revealed, is a son of a highly respected figure in MSU. He exuded confidence and showed willingness to be corrected. He was careful with his words and gave very detailed explanations. These examples show that children of parents who are responsive to their children's needs through their active participation and assistance demonstrate socially acceptable classroom behavior. Upbringing or the kind of environment provided by the family is a determining factor. It accounts for behavior flexibility, possession of coping strategies, and ability to acculturate, adapt, and accommodate in a culturally diverse setting.

On the other hand, there were students who constitute another group. Manifestations inside the classroom can be attributed to many factors that come into play. First, students whose family life is in turmoil suffer the effects of stress in several ways. Parents who are under pressure are severely hampered in their ability to help their children with schoolwork. Students themselves internalize family stress, and this damages their self-esteem and impairs their ability to learn. Their "psychological" wounds or scars leave them handicapped or maladjusted in one way or another.

CLUSTER 3: **Expressing Truthfulness and Equality**

- Question6: The classroom discussion is mediated by the teacher when some students ignore the viewpoints of others or when one cultural group monopolizes the discussion.
- Question9: The classroom discussion balances criticism and praise.
- Question17: The classroom discussion shows that the speaker establishes eye contact, thus expressing truthfulness and sincerity.
- Question10: The classroom discussion engages both verbally assertive and the less assertive ones.

In the classroom, there were instances when one student dominated the class or ignored the viewpoints of the other students. There were thus instances when one culture was given the center stage or unintended prominence in the class discussion. It is a commonplace—i.e, some monopolizing the class. Sometimes, a zealous student who dominated the discussion did not really intend to lord it over the class. Perhaps, the student just liked to articulate some idea he was passionate about and occasionally got carried away. This student's

monopoly of the discussion may inhibit the timid or timorous students in the class, or dampen the enthusiasm of those less assertive, resentment could not set in.

However, there were also students who did not want to contribute their views because of their cultural upbringing. There are cultures—e.g. Confucianism-influenced societies—where children are taught not to speak to elders because it is a sign of disrespect, or to engage in an exchange of views with other students because such agonistic tendency is feared to be seen as boastfulness or braggadocio. In some Asian societies, students listen to their teacher's lectures, in kneeling position. Culture thus expresses itself in many different ways.

In schools in the United States, timidity or silence of Asian students is only now beginning to be understood in the light of those students' cultural background. The teacher should not confuse silence with lack of knowledge or skill capability when dealing with culturally different groups. Such minority group students may not want to take the risk of offending by speaking up in a whole class discussion. To help solve this problem, small group discussions may be tried to encourage other groups to speak up. Silent or reticent individuals have been observed to open up that kind of learning context. A teacher's repertoire of classroom strategies or techniques must be rich enough to meet the diverse needs of a CLD class.

In one Humanities I class, a teacher uttered a negative comment to students who were not very open with their ideas. That bluntness did not help the situation; the students refused even more to speak. They withdrew further into reticence and further into their shells. Instead of helping the students pass through a cultural barrier, the teacher, who is in authority, reinforced the students' belief that they have no voice in the classroom. The hostile comment raised the students' affective filter.

CLUSTER 4: Channeling Classroom Tension towards Creativity

Question11. The classroom discussion recognizes students who raise their hands or students who volunteer to participate in class regardless of their cultural background.

Question12. The classroom discussion portrays a warm atmosphere by calling students by name with correct pronunciation.

Question13. The classroom discussion allows the giving of feedback and the asking of questions.

Question14. The classroom discussion permits the visible stereotyping of a particular group in the movie.

A culture is fluid and ever changing; it is never static. Cultures are dynamic, constantly evolving and influencing each other as they come into contact. Elements from the past are continually being combined and recombined with new elements from the present. A culture is something to be participated in rather than something imposed. All things that make up the culture should be considered in the classroom.

Usually tension builds up when conflicting beliefs and ideas surface and collide. The teacher must know how to respond to such a volatile situation. He or she must employ some strategy to make students involved in the fray calm down, and channel this tension towards creativity. How to effectively do this is a challenge for every teacher in Humanities 1. If a student feels restricted to a particular art activity, and wants some space, the teacher must provide a way for him/her to use his/her creativity for something fruitful. In cases of tension caused by classroom discussion, the teacher needs to be creative in restoring sobriety and order like looking for the positive thing in every situation.

This attests to the subject students' expression and communication of their views with conviction. The use of nonverbal communication, specifically, eye contact to reinforce verbal communication lends credence to utterances made by interlocutors.

As the Humanities classes were observed and rated, the result is perturbing enough. It would appear that the teachers do not as yet know their students well enough to be able to call them by their names. Shakespeare's famous sage advise—"a rose is a rose is a rose called by any name"—does not apply in this context. A name is part of students identity, and sense of identity is strengthened when one is called by his/her name; it is a form of recognition. Every student needs to be recognized. It is a capital offense for a teacher to treat any student as a face in the crowd, or worse, as mere statistic.

CLUSTER 5: Fostering Unity in Diversity

Question20: The classroom discussion has come up to a unified conclusion about the issues raised.

Question7: The classroom discussion leads to a conclusion that would put into the limelight a certain culture.

Question18: The classroom discussion uses examples varied enough to present various cultural groups in the classroom.

A question—which is better, cultural unity or diversity—was raised in a particular discussion. Indeed, it made great sense. The question rivets attention to the concept of multicultural education. Multicultural education, says Carreon, et.al (2006), not only draws content, concepts, paradigms, and theories from specialized interdisciplinary fields such as ethnic studies and women studies. Grounded in the ideals of social justice, educational equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full

potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, schools play an essential and crucial role in laying the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of oppression and injustice.

Among the Humanities 1 classes, there seemed to be an argument to have a unified conclusion on the issues presented. The discussion in itself was very delicate and potentially headed for troubled waters especially since it dealt with individual experiences due to cultural differences. The teacher was very cautious in approaching the matter; care was observed by avoiding calling from only one cultural group. However, it was noticed that, generally, students coming from outside Marawi City, that is, those who did not grow up in the Province of Lanao del Sur, usually did the talking and showed willingness to risk self-disclosure. This observation may touch on the issue of putting a particular culture in the limelight because the culture of these students, their side of the story and their opinions on particular matter, are oftentimes the ones heard. Other cultures are excluded from the discourse, or relegated to the background.

CLUSTER 6: Growing through Cultural Accountability

Question 15: The classroom discussion prompts students to provide a fuller answer or explanation before moving on to another topic.

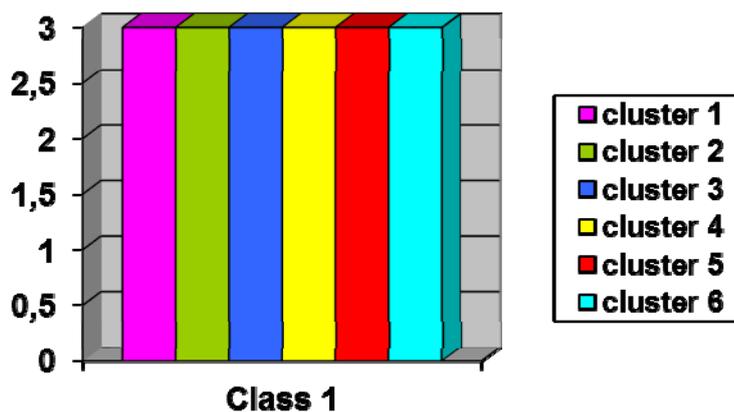
Question 16: The classroom discussion offers time for explanation why a comment is offensive or insensitive.

Question 8: The classroom discussion discourages distasteful remarks even those made jokingly and does not allow accusing comments to pass unnoticed.

This cluster is about being responsible for every action that a student does in the classroom. For every answer that he or she gives, an explanation must follow so that he or she may be understood fully. Jokes and distasteful comments must be avoided because even if done with no intended malice, these may be perceived negatively as these are often relative to cultures. Cultural slurs engender ill feelings between groups and may cause dissonance a war of words.

It is important that students and teachers offer time for explanation why a comment is offensive or insensitive so that such a comment can be avoided in the future. In the Humanities 1 classes, this could be seen through the way the teacher and students handle their responses. In a particular classroom situation in one Humanities class, two students were going full steam ahead in their defense of what they believed was the real cause of the conflict in the movie *Freedom Writers*. There was a commotion when these two students started raising their voices. The teacher stepped in to mediate and offered each of them equal time to explain their sides. Order was restored and the mood became less adversarial or confrontational. The six clusters finally explained in detail, it is important to know that the above clusters are color coded and the same color coding is applied to the table and graphs that follow.

Figure 1. A Graph Showing the Classroom Rating of Class 1



The graph above shows the characteristics of Class 1. As seen here, in all aspects of cultural sensitivity, Class 1 belongs to the 3rd level in the scale of cultural sensitivity. This means that Class 1 is more likely characterized by the classroom description. As observed during the classroom discussion, a good number of students participated. However, there were also some who kept silent and just listened to those who were very vocal or outspoken.

Class 1 is a large class. As observed, the teacher instructed the students to form into groups in preparation for the oral examination. The instructor made clear to the students that the oral examination would be graded that was why as each student recited, the spontaneity was disturbed because the instructor would always ask for the name. Management in a large class is indeed difficult. It is a real challenge to the teacher.

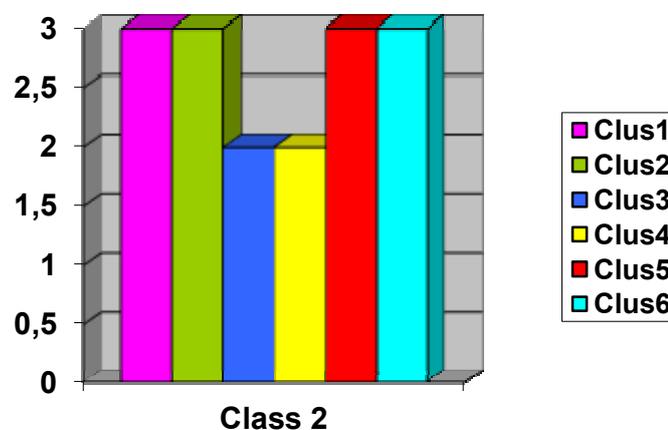
During the class discussion, each group was given a question to answer. In this case, two groups have the same questions so that there would be exchange of differing points of view. The first question was about the

greatest problem in the story. The first group identified racial discrimination as one of the major problems in the movie in addition to poverty and gang involvement.

The other group insisted on lack of respect for each other as the main reason for the conflict in the movie. They vehemently stood by their answer by challenging the other group, asking the latter what really was the root of racial discrimination, which, as they contended, is lack of respect. As the discussion progressed, the students involved in the discourse eventually concurred with Group 2's answer. There was a hint of cultural insensitivity when a particular group did not listen to the reasons of the other members of the class; such dismissive attitude tended to fuel or stoke heated discussion.

For the class, the primary cause of the problems dramatized in the film is the kind of family background that the students have. Family background or relations at home have a debilitating effect, hindering progress in school. The Class 1 students were sensitive or perceptive enough to note that almost, if not all, students have dysfunctional families. According to Class 1 students' synthesis of the discussion, the family is indisputably the major contributing factor in the aberrant behavior and delinquent showing of the characters in the class of Ms. Gruwell. The students of Ms. Gruwell suffer from identity crisis, lack of a sense of direction in life, or aimlessness, lack of a sense of belonging, and unacknowledged longing for love and appreciation.

Figure 2. A Graph Showing the Classroom Rating of Class 2



Class 2 is rated 3rd in four clusters while in the other two clusters, it was ranked 2. On the scale of 4, where 4 is the highest positive value and 1 is the lowest, this class is more likely characterized by the issues or features raised in each cluster and likely characteristic of the others. The clusters that were identified in the 3rd level are clusters 1, 2, 5 and 6.

This class is composed of 80 students, hence, is the largest of all the large Humanities 1 classes. Handling such a big number of students requires mental agility and adroitness; in short, consummate management skills on the part of the teacher. Like any other Humanities 1 classes, the students are diverse in terms of religion and cultural background. They also have a high percent of diversity in terms of language used at home.

As observed, the class had a group discussion of what the movie is all about. Students were asked to report to class their answers to the five questions that were given to them. The teacher asked the students how long it would take them to answer the questions. No one answered. She kept on asking the same question until she realized that she had not given the time yet.

During the class discussion, the instructor interrupted every time a student recited. Although, the teacher's intention was good, the student talk lost its spontaneity. For the whole duration of the classroom discussion, virtues like tolerance and compassion were raised as the things essential to solving the problem of racial discrimination, different perceptions and cultural differences.

There nearly was furor when one student narrated her unpleasant experience which was caused by cultural differences. She told the class about the unfair treatment of certain groups of students. She had this grievance that she wanted to air: "Non-Muslim" students who were first in the line, during enrolment when students would queue up for the processing of papers, were denied prompt service because "Muslim" students were more favored or accorded special treatment.

Another case involves a conflict that actually erupted inside the classroom. One Meranao student got involved in a very serious verbal encounter with a Christian student. That discussion did not end well. Although the experience of issue is only the experience of a friend of a student in Class 2, still the classroom atmosphere was surcharged with tension. In an attempt to ease the tension, the teacher cracked a joke. It worked, the tension subsided.

The teacher in Class 2 spoke Visaya or the vernacular, and evidently some of the students did not understand her. This language barrier excluded them from the discourse. This particular teacher code switched almost all the time, causing other students who form the majority, problem with comprehension. They felt shut out.

Figure 3. A Graph Showing the Classroom Rating of Class 3



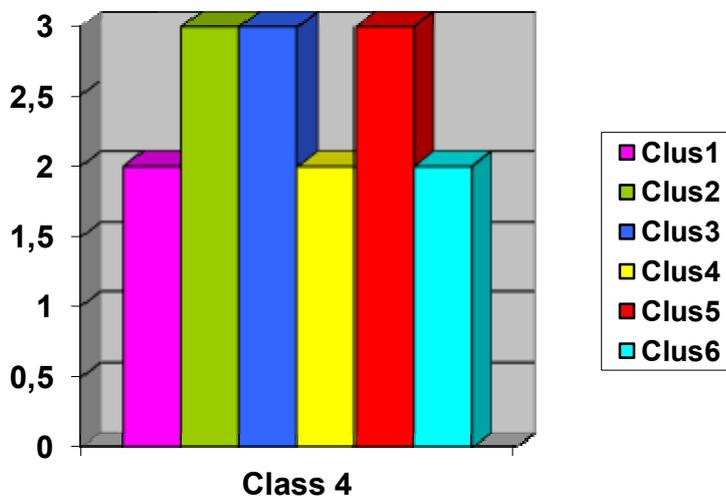
As seen in the above graph, the highest scale they achieved is 2, meaning they are likely characteristic of the classroom discussion. In cluster 6, the class scaled lowest, that is 1, which means that cluster 6 items are never characteristics of the class. It is very important to remember that this cluster is about growing through cultural sensitivity. If the class does not accept responsibility for their own individual actions and speech, the possibility of students getting drawn to heated arguments and real clashes is great. Inflexibility or intransigence would characterize members of this class.

Class 3 is another large class. The class was also tasked to answer the five questions but too much time was allotted for that. Consequently, the class discussion was not as exhaustive as that in the other classes.

Another problem that emerged during the class discussion was the monopoly wielded by one student who sounded very fluent in English. He was obviously carried away by his enthusiasm, aided by his good command of the language. The effect of his impressive articulateness on the students is that the latter found him intimidating and so were reluctant to speak up. They felt cowed by the fluency of their voluble classmate; there was unconscious fear that they might suffer by comparison. It was unintentional on the part of the former. As he said, “there is no monopoly of ideas here,” meaning that he did not have any intention of dominating the discussion, his actions, however, seemed to believe his statement. His nonstop gab, however, did not allow others to voice out their thoughts.

The teacher could have stepped in as facilitator or moderator and encouraged others to participate in the discussion. Such a situation calls for firm intervention.

Figure 4. A Graph Showing the Classroom Rating of Class 4

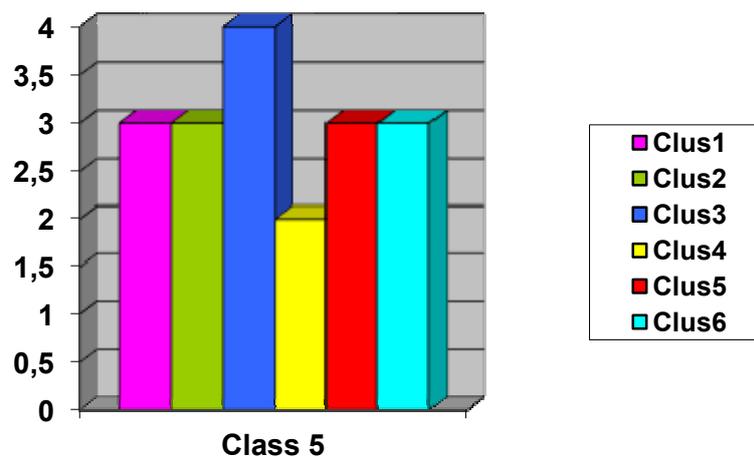


The graph reveals that Class 4 ranges from 2-3 which means this class is likely characterized by the items or categories used to rate classroom discussion. Class 4 was noted to be dominated by a few students who belong to the upper 5% studentry in terms of academic performances or status. These students were articulate and certainly dominated the class discussion.

The teacher of this class set the mood for the class discussion. They reviewed the content of the film. Several factors like sad and painful experiences, misunderstanding, social deprivation, and fight for territory over race and culture and pride were brought up. To solve the problem dramatized in the story, the class pointed out the importance of open communication.

During the discussion, the students were asked to choose who among the characters in the movie did they like best. Erin and Eva are two of the major characters chosen. Students presented reasons for their choice during the deliberation. With regards to the experience that the student have concerning cultural differences, one student pointed out that he had not experienced conflict because he has always respected people of different beliefs and culture.

Figure 5. A Graph Showing the Classroom Rating of Class 5

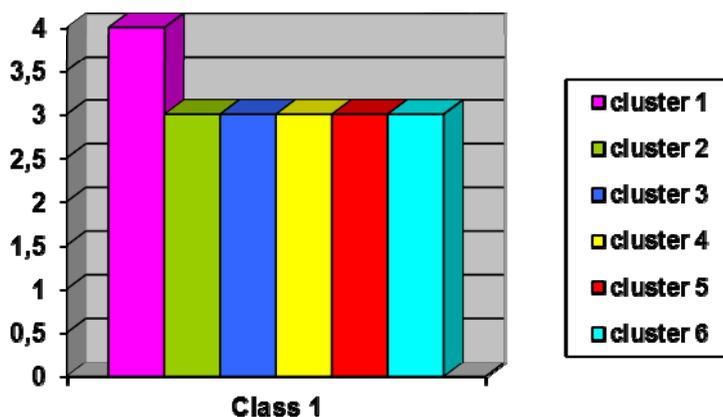


The graph shows a diverse scale in terms of clusters. Class 5, among the classes, is the only one that reached the scale 4 in the general rating. Class 5 is another large class. The teacher emphasized what Eva said in the movie, “I don’t know you, why should I respect you?” The students saw at once what the problem really is. It takes a heart to really touch a heart. Although this was a good conclusion, the students were not able to induce the concept because before they could, it was given directly by the teacher.

Moreover, the teacher dominated half of the session. The teacher talk took up much time, half of which was allotted for classroom discussion. The students were asked to choose one virtue that would be the best solution to the problem. The students reacted when the teacher said that after they have chosen the virtue, they would debate and defend this in class. From this reaction could be deduced that those students were not yet ready to open up especially in a large class. Usually, in a large class, reluctance due to a myriad of causes is the usual problem why no meaningful discussion occurs in the class.

Level of Cultural Sensitivity as Reflected through Student Interview

Figure 6. A Graph Showing the Classroom 1 Discourse Rating through Student Interviews



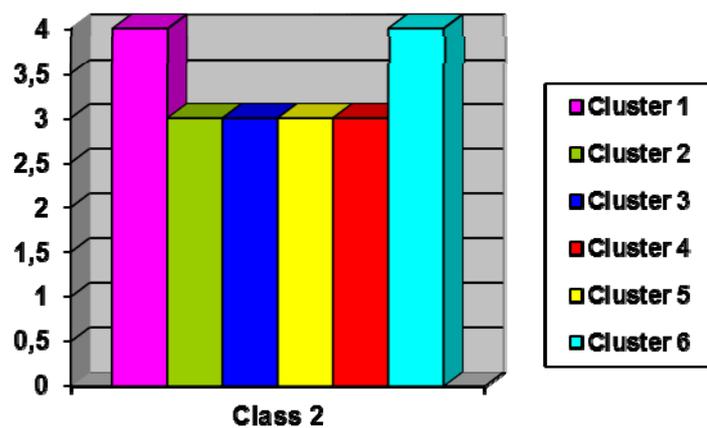
Generally, scale 3 still works as a fitting description of the classroom. This means that the students viewed the classroom discussion as sensitive enough. Perhaps, for some of the students, they may not have been able to participate openly but they were given chances to talk.

One particular student commented during the interview that he felt comfortable and confident to express all his ideas about a certain culture that was discussed during the grouping. Basically, he behaved this way because he admitted that with regards to culture, he is very sensitive. Another student said that, at first, she felt very awkward because she was with students who were not so close to her. She just drew confidence from the presence of her co-majors. Another interviewee who belonged in this class claimed that he loves to recite inside the classroom. He is one of the students who relished expressing opinions without minding what other people would say. This is plainly insensitivity.

On the other hand, there was an interviewee who commented that if she had just focused on the negative side of being inside the diverse classroom, she would really react to the things that her classmates said. It was the language barrier that affected her most. According to this interviewee, some students use “deep” Visayan words, which are sometimes foreign to her, and the teacher did nothing to facilitate or mediate the situation.

Another interviewee from Butuan, a Surigaonon by birth, said that she is still a bit confused about the traditions of the Muslim peoples. She admitted that she also had experienced conflict because of cultural differences in the cottage where she stayed before. The experience left her with a hang over of the effect of that conflict. This accounts for hesitation or reluctance to mingle with other students who come from backgrounds different from hers.

Figure 7. A Graph Showing Classroom 2 Discourse Rating through Student Interviews



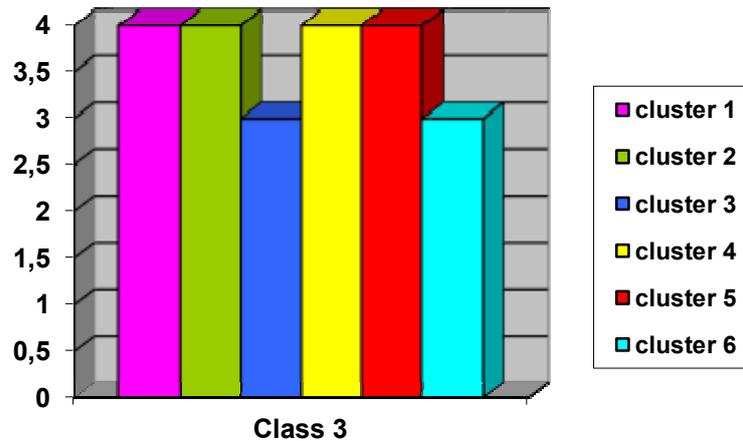
The class has still a general rating of 3, meaning the classroom discussion is more likely characterized in its discussion by the features grouped into six clusters. One interviewee said that what made it difficult for her to participate in the class discourse is her awareness of the different personalities of her classmates, which have been molded by different family, societal and cultural differences.

Another interviewee said that the diverse faces and attitudes made her uneasy in the classroom. She also found out that it was difficult for her to approach instructors who do not have the same culture as hers. Although in the discussion of the movie, no explosive clash erupted, it was evident that they were not able to express their thoughts freely.

However, one interviewee expressed her positive reactions to the class. She did not feel any tension inside the classroom even if she is a Christian. When asked for the reason behind such calmness, she said that she is already used to the Maranao culture because she grew up in the MSU. Her mother is an MSU employee. With regards to the teacher, she said she was also very comfortable because she has known the teacher from childhood. Familiarity explained her calmness.

One student from this section said that it was not easy for her to participate because whenever she was about to give her idea, the boy at her back would finish the sentence for her. Probably, the boy comes from a culture that has its own discourse rules—e.g. turn-taking, turn-grabbing, etc.—and these conflicted with the discourse rules operating in the culture in which the interviewee grew up. That was lack of respect and sensitivity to the feeling of the interviewee. It was also very difficult for her because only a few of the class participated in the classroom discussion.

Figure 8. A Graph Showing Classroom 3 Discourse Rating through Student Interviews



Although this class has a visible high result in the rating, there are minute details that were revealed during the interview that accounted for the effect of cultural diversity in the classroom.

An interviewee said that she was comfortable in the class but she also said that this is so because she was talking only to her co Meranaos. To restate, she was afraid or uncomfortable dealing with members of the class who do not belong to her culture. In fact, she said that she felt shy every time she attempted to talk to her non-Meranao classmates.

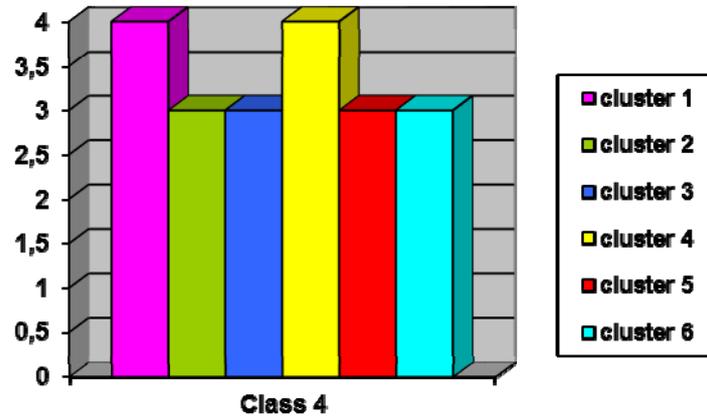
Another interviewee said that during the classroom discussion, he was sort of defending his own education. By that, he meant that he had to express what he thought was right and what he knew was appropriate. He was so infuriatingly confident that his classmates were turned off and annoyed and all he got was the message to stop talking, which the class got across through gestures.

Still another said that she felt just fine during the class discussion because she did not speak in front of the class. She was enjoying the comfort of her seat. She was not able to see the sparks flying between the two students in their class during the heated exchange of words.

Moreover, another interviewee said that it was amazing being able to express what was gleaned from the film they had just viewed. This some interviewee emphasized that the major reason why some of the students were unable to express their opinions was the difference in cultural affiliation. In her case, for example, her cultural background was different from that of her instructor. This explains why she had a hard time communicating with her nonverbally although, generally, she had a good and meaningful experience during the class discussion. The diversity in the classroom has both positive and negative effects on the part of the students: positive because the students mostly the risk-takers, challenged to give what they think is best and negative because, awareness of classroom diversity, had a dampening effect and students, would rather sit down and remain quiet. The specter of divergent perspectives or viewpoints is in itself intimidating. Students do not, perhaps, relish the idea of being drawn into a verbal fencing or clash of opinions.

Another respondent spoke about his experience during the class discussion. He was the one who talked about an encounter he had someone. He also admitted that there were times when he felt threatened by those people who have different cultural and religious backgrounds. He said prudence has taught him to respect their beliefs and traditions.

Figure 9. A Graph Showing the Classroom 4 Discourse Rating through Student Interviews



It earned a “4” rating for two clusters out of the six. This means that the class is more likely characterized in its classroom discussion by those features. There are some reasons for this and these were revealed by the interviewees themselves in their own observations during the classroom discussion.

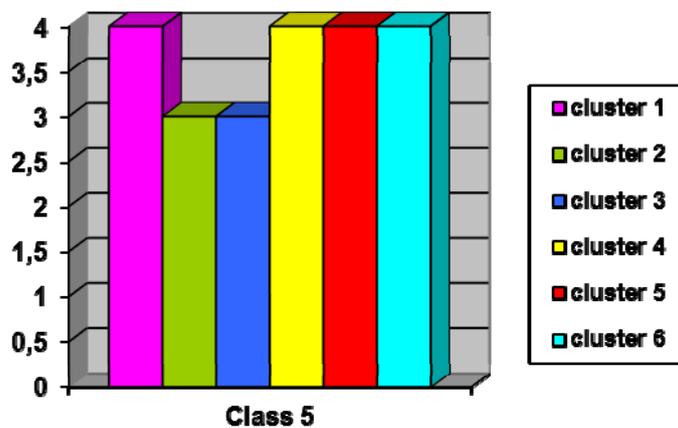
One interviewee said that though she is not pessimistic about this, she sometimes felt some difficulty in participating in the classroom discussion. Nevertheless, she felt she did not have much of a choice and did participate because she must earn a grade. But in truth, she would rather sit down and not talk. She was not used to interacting with others and she closed with the words that if the person is good to her, she would reciprocate and be good to the person, too. That was once person who subscribes to the Golden Rule, or reciprocity as a desideratum.

Moreover, one interviewee said that there was no racial discrimination but admitted that she feared expressing her thoughts, ideas and feelings. She said that it was all about how to open the minds of her classmates to accept her ideas on issues discussed, especially on cultural differences. Language was not really the big barrier that hindered her from communicating. However, she was hesitant to express whatever she thought and felt for fear of being rejected or ridiculed.

One student said that although the questions were not very difficult, still she felt uneasy during the classroom discussion because the answers required thoughts from the heart, the unveiling of one’s self before the crowd. That, for her, was very difficult.

Another interviewee who also belonged to this class said that she felt that the movie they had watched depicted a situation similar to the situation that they have inside the classroom. Although there was really no gang violence inside a Humanities 1 class, the class is described as a salad bowl in which different cultures converge. According to this interviewee, though she was in a diverse culture, she did not experience conflict because her parents raised her well and taught her to respect people of different cultures. The vital role of the family as a major determining factor in preparing one for dealing with students with different cultural backgrounds is given special emphasis.

Figure 10. A Graph Showing the Classroom 5 Discourse Rating through Student Interviews



The class' rating ranged from scale 3-4. One particular student said that she was slightly nervous during the class discussion. It was difficult for her because some of her classmates were not interested and attentive. She sensed that her classmates were not very friendly, and this caused her some difficulty in participating in the classroom discussion.

A transferee from Central Mindanao University said that he could relate to the film that they were required to watch. At first, he was hesitant to answer the questions given to them during the class discussion because he was afraid of the instructor. However, he thought of his classmates who had the guts to talk and air their opinions, and he felt more relaxed. It was the classroom environment or climate that emboldened him to talk.

Further to that, an interviewee said they were treated equally in their class. She felt comfortable though at first she was afraid and felt shy to express her opinions. Later she realized that there was nothing wrong with ventilating and sharing ideas. Accompanying this response is the idea of a fear attack similar to anxiety attack every time she engaged in discussion. It is only a low affective learning environment that can motivate a student with high a filter to participate in the classroom discussion.

Still, another respondent who belonged to this class said there were topics raised that put a particular culture in the limelight, in effect relegating the other cultures to the background, or conveying the impression that the latter are inferior. She said that one of her classmates too hastily generalized about the Maranaos sounding like they were fighting when they converse because of the shrill pitch and loudness. Her classmates have observed the same. She seemed oblivious of the possibility that she could have offended the Maranao students in that class. She further said that she felt nervous because of the existing diversity in the classroom. She was afraid she might say a word that could hurt or offend the others. There is a paradox here. She declared being apprehensive about her words offending others, but there was no awareness of the gaffe she committed when she made that earlier remark about the Meranao's speech style.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that generally, the classroom discussion is highly characterized by the items grouped into clusters on the rating sheets—e.g. promotion of expression, fostering unity in diversity, channeling tension towards creativity, etc. During the interview, it was revealed that the students had generally experienced a positive/reinforcing and culturally sensitive classroom discussion.

IMPLICATIONS

From the above findings and conclusions, it is abducted that the classroom discussion revealed that to be able to measure the level of cultural sensitivity of the teacher-student and student-student interactions, they must be engaged in a meaningful talk or discussion. Teacher-fronted discussions will not work well in a diverse classroom, because these do not allow room for dialectics or dialogues and the negotiation of meaning these exchanges entail.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Katherine and Gloria J. Galanes (2003). *Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills*. USA: McGrawHill.
- Aktuna, S. *Intercultural Communication in English Language Teacher Education*.
<http://www.oup.com/pdf/elt/catalogue/eltj1.pdf>
- Banks, James (1994). *Multiethnic Education: Theory and Practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Burtonwood, Neil (1986). *Culture Concept in Educational Studies*. Berkshire, England: The NFER-NELSON Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Carreon, Myrna L., et.al. (2006). *Social Dimensions of Education*. Manila: Lorimar Publishing Co., Inc.
- Nunan, David (1991). *Methods in Second Language Classroom-Oriented Research Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenman, A.A. (1987). "The Value of Multicultural Curricula" *Education Week*, 7 (10).
- Rodriguez, R. (1987). "What is an American Education?" *Education Week*, 7 (1).
- Pare, Arleen Lyda (1994). "Attending to Resistance: An Ethnographic Study of Resistance and Attendance in an Adult Basic Education Classroom." Unpublished Thesis, UBC, Vancouver, Canada.

Acknowledgments

The researcher extends her heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Rebekah M. Alawi, her research adviser and mentor, whose input and scholarly advice made this paper more scholarly. The researcher is also grateful to the teachers of the Humanities I classes who willingly allowed their classes to be the respondents of this study and to the students or respondents who willing shared their time during the interview. Furthermore, the researcher wishes to thank Ms. Erin Gruwell and the makers of Freedom Writers (Movie).

Rating Sheet

Section: Humanities 1 _____ **Direction: Rate the classroom discussion according to the following:**

(Put a check mark (✓) in the box that best describes your answer to each item.)

1=never a characteristic of the classroom discussion

2=likely a characteristic of the classroom discussion

3=more likely a characteristic of the classroom discussion

4=highly a characteristic of the classroom discussion

	1	2	3	4
1. The classroom discussion encourages students to participate openly in the discussion.				
2. The classroom discussion encourages students to listen and value comments.				
3. The classroom discussion allows students to voice out their feelings when their culture is offended.				
4. The classroom discussion allows students to voice out or talk about their own experiences as influenced by their social identity and cultural background.				
5. The classroom discussion talks about respect, tolerance, love and other virtues as a relative thing depending on the culture of the people involved.				
6. The classroom discussion is mediated by the teacher when some students ignore the viewpoints of others or when one cultural group monopolizes the discussion.				
7. The classroom discussion leads to a conclusion that would put into the limelight a certain culture.				
8. The classroom discussion discourages distasteful remarks even those made jokingly and does not allow accusing comments to pass unnoticed.				
9. The classroom discussion balances criticism and praise.				
10. The classroom discussion engages both verbally assertive students and the less assertive ones.				
11. The classroom discussion recognizes students who raise their hands or students who volunteer to participate in class regardless of their cultural background.				
12. The classroom discussion portrays a warm atmosphere by calling students by name with correct pronunciation.				
13. The classroom discussion allows the giving of feedback and the asking of questions.				
14. The classroom discussion permits the visible stereotyping of a particular group in the movie.				
15. The classroom discussion prompts students to provide a fuller answer or explanation before moving on to another topic.				
16. The classroom discussion offers time for explanation why a comment is offensive or insensitive.				
17. The classroom discussion shows that the speaker establishes eye contact, thus expressing truthfulness and sincerity.				
18. The classroom discussion uses examples varied enough to present various cultural groups in the classroom.				
19. The classroom discussion reveals an awareness of cultural misrepresentation of any group found in the movie.				
20. The classroom discussion has come up to unified conclusion about the issues raised.				

Interview Rating Sheet

Direction: For each interview portion, rate the classroom discussion according to the following:

(Put a check mark (✓) in the box that best describes your answer to each item.)

- 1=never a characteristic of the classroom discussion as revealed in the interview
- 2=likely a characteristic of the classroom discussion as revealed in the interview
- 3=more likely a characteristic of the classroom discussion as revealed in the interview
- 4=highly a characteristic of the classroom discussion as revealed in the interview

	1	2	3	4
1. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion encourages students to participate openly in the discussion.				
2. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion allows students to voice out their feelings.				
3. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion allows students to voice out or to talk about their own experiences.				
4. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion talks about respect, tolerance, love and other virtues as a relative thing.				
5. The interview reveals that in the classroom discussion, the teacher mediates the classroom discussion equally.				
6. The interview reveals that both the verbally assertive students and the less assertive ones are engaged in the discussion.				
7. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion allows the students to participate comfortably in the classroom discussion.				
8. The interview reveals that classroom discussion allows the giving of feedback and the asking of questions.				
9. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion highlights a certain culture.				
10. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion has come up to a unified conclusion about the issues raised.				
11. The interview reveals that the classroom discussion prompts students to provide a fuller answer or explanation before moving on to another topic.				
12. The interview reveals that classroom discussion discourages distasteful remarks even those made jokingly and does not allow accusing comments to pass unnoticed.				

(Please affix your signature above your name.)

Rater