

**Preparing students for  
differences in  
educational style**

The logo for Nuffic, featuring the word "nuffic" in a white, lowercase, serif font. The text is centered within a large orange rectangle that is split vertically by a white line.

**Nuffic**

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## **Contents**

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	2
Chapter 2: Preparing students for the educational style in the Netherlands.....	3
Chapter 3: The main characteristics of the Dutch educational style .....	7
Chapter 4: Best practice workshop by the Faculty ITC/University of Twente .....	10
Chapter 5: Conclusion .....	12
Literature.....	13
Appendix 1: Hand-out.....	14
Appendix 2: Workshop 'Education at ITC' .....	23

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Between 2007 and 2010 Nuffic participated as a partner in the NAP Acculturation project ([www.acculturatie.nl](http://www.acculturatie.nl)), which aimed to assist foreign students in preparing for their studies in the international classrooms of Dutch higher education. In an online initiative students were offered remedial programmes on learning content, a familiarisation programme on Dutch educational culture, and a social programme in cooperation with their Dutch peers as a possible start to their own social network.

The project clearly showed that, among other things, more attention was needed for preparing students for the differences in educational style before the start of their study programmes in the Netherlands. Hence, Nuffic contacted an expert in this field, Ms Ineke ten Dam, senior education specialist at the Faculty ITC (formerly the independent International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation/ITC) of the University of Twente, asking her to contribute to Nuffic's *Your practical guide to living in Holland* publication (2010). In this publication, which is aimed at international students who are about to depart for the Netherlands to embark on their study programme, Ms ten Dam describes how they can best prepare for the Dutch educational style. Her input has also been incorporated in the Nuffic Neso pre-departure briefings.

It is important, however, for everyone involved with international students at Dutch higher education institutions (including the international marketers) to realise that the difference between the Dutch educational style and what they are used to at home could very well affect the performance and well-being of international students (Ten Dam & Rusman, 1999). Therefore in this report Ms ten Dam summarises the Dutch educational style, and offers Dutch institutions and international marketers in particular several ways of preparing students for the differences in educational styles. Best practice is handled in the form of a workshop offered to international students by the Faculty ITC/University of Twente, and in appendix 1 you will find an easy-to-use hand-out that will help you to organise your own workshop and improve communication with students.

## Chapter 2: Preparing students for the educational style in the Netherlands

Recruiting international students means the education institution concerned is responsible for ensuring the well-being of the students. Hence, the arrival of the students and the provision of a short practical introduction at the institute should not signal the end of the task of international marketers at Dutch higher education institutions. A more active involvement in managing expectations regarding the Dutch educational style is advisable, in order to ensure successful student performance and well-being.

You probably know from experience that, although most international students have duly prepared for their stay and study in the Netherlands, many still experience problems. They have learnt that Dutch culture and daily life differ from what they are used to, and that the education system and language of instruction will be different. But what many do not realise is that the educational style will differ as well. Often they are insufficiently prepared for this difference and have expectations that will not be met by reality.

No matter how well they prepare, Vietnamese students, for example, may be surprised that Dutch lecturers actively involve students in their lectures by asking them questions. And Thai students may not understand that, whereas they think the assignment is far from complete, group mates may consider it finished. Or Colombian students may find Dutch lecturers and students unfriendly and unhelpful. A proper introduction to the Dutch educational style will help international students to understand these situations and adapt more easily to the new style.

### 2.1 Educational style

Educational style is described as the combination of the ways in which lecturers teach, students are expected to study, and students are assessed. Although the educational styles at institutions in the same country may differ, these styles have all developed within the same society and educational system, reflect similar values and ideas, and consequently have many aspects in common. These common aspects constitute a country's educational style. Seven important aspects in which educational styles differ are (Ten Dam, 1999):

- **Relation lecturer-student:** This relation may be more or less formal and more or less hierarchical.
- **Interaction in class:** This may range from one-way to two-way to multiple-way communication.
- **Relation student-student:** This relation much depends on the importance of the group and class versus the importance of individual members of the group (collectivism versus individualism).
- **Regulation of the learning process:** Responsibility for what, when and how to learn may range from being the full responsibility of the lecturer to being the full responsibility of the student.
- **Aim of learning:** Learning may focus mainly on the understanding of theory or more on the development of professional and/or academic skills.

- **Use of resources and media:** The availability and use of laboratories, computers, books and other resources determines how much time can be devoted to practical sessions.
- **Assessment and grading:** The content and type of assessment will differ in line with the aim of learning. Grading systems differ. Grading may range from absolute to relative.

Besides the skills (e.g. study skills, academic and professional skills, laboratory and computer skills) that students already possess when they enter the new course, the educational style of their previous education determines to a great extent their expectations of the course and the educational style offered by your institution.

## 2.2 Managing expectations regarding educational style

Managing expectations and helping students to adapt to the educational style of your institute already starts when marketing and promoting study in the Netherlands and at your institute, and continues after recruiting them. When marketing and promoting your institution it is important to provide a clear picture of what to expect of study in the Netherlands, and to indicate some key aspects of the Dutch educational style ; to introduce students to the differences in educational style before the course starts; and to ensure during the course that lecturers and study advisors/study counsellors offer follow-up and monitor the adaptation among international students.

### *1. Information about the Dutch educational style in marketing & promotion*

As a marketer, it is your task to offer prospective students a good picture of what to expect of a study period in the Netherlands, including what the educational style will be. Prospective students need to understand the main aspects of the Dutch educational style in order to make an informed choice when deciding where to study. They need to consider whether the Dutch educational style suits them, whether they find it appealing, and ultimately whether they would be able to successfully complete a study programme or course offered on the basis of the Dutch educational style.

At the same time the Dutch educational style has many advantages and may be very appealing to prospective students (and their parents). The benefits of studying and graduating in the Netherlands as described in chapter 3 will certainly offer elements that could help you to promote studying at your institution and in the Netherlands.

You can incorporate the characteristics of the Dutch educational style in promotional materials and your website. To find ideas for your website, take a look at the Study in Holland website ([www.studyinholland.nl](http://www.studyinholland.nl), which contains a section on the [Dutch way of teaching](#) and the [Dutch grading system](#)). You should also try to talk about the Dutch educational style when counselling students.

## 2. Introduction to differences in educational style

When international students have been recruited, it is essential to introduce them in more detail to the education system and educational style of your institution before classes start. Before their first encounter with lecturers and other staff involved in education, they should have realised already that the educational style will be different, that lecturers will behave differently, that new skills and behaviour will be expected of them as students, and that examinations may be different as well. The most common methods of achieving this are to:

- send students information about the educational style of your institution before their departure. The hand-out presented in appendix 1 could be used for this purpose, or the Nuffic brochure *Your practical guide to living in Holland* (2010), which includes a slightly adapted version of the hand-out.
- invite your international students from countries where a Nuffic Neso office is located to join the Nuffic Neso pre-departure briefings. In these briefings attention is given to such topics as the differences between the local and Dutch educational styles. Picture 1 depicts an example of a pre-departure briefing.
- introduce students to the new educational style in the introduction week. This report includes a description of a best practice workshop by the Faculty ITC/University of Twente that you can use as an example.



Picture 1: Pre-departure briefing by Nuffic Neso Indonesia where Indonesian students are being urged to not always sit at the back of the classroom

## 3. Follow-up by lecturers and study advisors/student counsellors

As a marketer you can organise briefings for lecturers and study advisors/student counsellors to establish their role in helping international students to adapt to the new educational style. Lecturers are advised to introduce a method when it is used for the first time: explain the purpose of the method,

why it has been chosen, the role of the lecturer and what is expected from the students. Students will better understand what is expected of them if they are shown the results of assignments of previous years. Academic skills such as critical thinking and comparing and reviewing articles are very difficult to explain and can best be demonstrated. Lecturers could come to class early or stay a bit later to make it easier for international students to come forward with questions and difficulties.

Study advisors/student counsellors must realise (if they don't already) that students can have adaptation problems related to educational style, and should make this a regular point of attention in their meetings with international students.

## Chapter 3: The main characteristics of the Dutch educational style

This chapter gives a summary of the Dutch educational style. In appendix 1 you will find a comprehensive description of the Dutch educational style in the hand-out written especially for students.

### 3.1 Dutch educational style

The common values and beliefs in Dutch culture and society that have had a strong effect on the educational style in the Netherlands are as follows:

- **Equality of all human beings**, regardless of differences in race, status, religion or age. Hierarchy is limited in Dutch society and organisations, including education institutions. Lecturers and students are also equal; the only relevant differences relate to their respective roles as lecturer or student and to expertise, which the lecturer already has and the student does not.
- **Relative lack of competition**: since everyone has the same rights and equal chances, including access to higher education, the level of competition between students is low.
- **Rules are rules**: Dutch society runs on rules. Exceptions to the rules, particularly for individuals, are very rare. For the Dutch, rules are there to guarantee fair and equal treatment for all.
- **Own opinions**: children are encouraged to develop their own opinions and ideas at a very young age and to take a critical view of things. In other cultures students may have to master existing knowledge before their own opinion is appreciated.
- **Honesty**: although politeness is important, saying what you really think is highly valued. Being able to accept the 'honest' opinions and criticism of others is something that children start to learn at an early age in the Netherlands.
- **Independence**: Dutch society is individualistic. The nuclear family (parents and children) is the main social unit. The level of responsibility felt for other groups, including extended families, is relatively low. People are responsible for their own lives and make their own choices. This is also expected in higher education: students are expected to study rather independently and take care of themselves.
- **Active learning**: the Dutch believe that active learning is the best. Selective and critical reading are stimulated, as is active participation in class. Practice and application are required to complete the learning process.

These values and beliefs are clearly visible in the educational style in the Netherlands and the seven aspects of educational style described in chapter 2.

- **Relation lecturer-student**: this relation is quite informal and can hardly be termed hierarchical. The relation is businesslike and does not extend beyond office hours. Students are expected to take care of themselves. If students don't raise an issue, lecturers will assume that everything is going well.

- **Interaction in class:** most classes in Dutch higher education are interactive. Questions and discussions during lectures and other classes are common. Interaction between students in groups (e.g. on projects or cases) is also very common.
- **Relation student-student:** students operate individually; loyalty to the students in class is not so important. As far as marks are concerned, competition between students hardly plays a role, and most students don't know their class ranking.
- **Regulation of the learning process:** students are responsible for their own learning. The lecturer expects independence, initiative and the student's own choice of study strategy. Often lectures are not compulsory. In addition to assignments with detailed instructions, open assignments are common, where students themselves have to find out how to approach the assignment. The role of the lecturer ranges from acting as an expert in lectures to being a coach in open assignments, where he/she will not tell the students what to do but stimulate them to find solutions themselves.
- **Aim of learning:** students are taught to become independent thinkers and develop their own ideas and opinions. Furthermore, they are given the opportunity to acquire sufficient knowledge, a critical attitude, and the skills to apply what they have learnt in solving problems, as well as the skills to present and defend their work. Memorising and understanding are seen as valuable techniques, but only as a first step in learning. A large proportion of nearly all courses is spent on practical work (writing papers, projects, cases).
- **Use of resources and media:** Dutch education institutions are relatively wealthy and have many resources, such as computer clusters, laboratories, libraries and modern teaching equipment. Training in practical skills is also a common component in nearly all courses in secondary education (which may explain the differences in skill levels of incoming international students in higher education). Books are widely available for self-study and students need selective reading skills to decide what they wish to study or use for papers.
- **Assessment and grading:** examinations assess both knowledge and higher-order skills such as application and problem-solving skills. Marks range from 1 to 10, with 6 being the pass mark and the marks 6 to 8 being most commonly awarded. Grading is absolute and does not depend on the marks of fellow students. Assessment rules are important and deviation is rare.

### 3.2 Benefits of studying in the Netherlands

The Dutch educational style strongly stimulates the development of specific skills and attitudes that may make studying in the Netherlands appealing to prospective students. Graduates of Dutch higher education are highly valued in many countries because of these skills and attitudes.

Graduates of Dutch higher education are confident individuals who:

- have high-level professional and/or academic skills;
- can apply what they have learnt and can solve problems;

- can present and defend their work;
- have cooperation skills and can work in groups;
- are independent thinkers, and can develop new ideas and take a critical view of things when appropriate;
- can take the initiative and make their own choices when appropriate;
- value the equal treatment of everyone, regardless of their position in society or wealth.

These benefits of studying and graduating in the Netherlands offer elements that could help you to promote studying at your institute and in the Netherlands.

## **Chapter 4: Best practice workshop by the Faculty ITC/University of Twente**

### **4.1 Organisation**

The Faculty ITC/University of Twente does not send information about its educational style to the students before their departure. The Faculty has chosen to offer a half-day workshop on educational style to all incoming students in the introduction week, just before the first courses start. The workshop is given by a lecturer, education specialist or study advisor/student counsellor who has sufficient experience of international students and at least some knowledge of differences in educational style.

Although the participation of Dutch students is not necessary as regards the actual content of the workshop, it is beneficial for the integration of international and domestic students and is therefore recommended. Besides, it is also useful for Dutch students – especially for those about to embark on a bachelor's or master's programme – to reflect on the style of education they are used to and to focus on a possible new style.

The workshop and scenario are described in detail in appendix 2 and can be used as an example for other institutes.

### **4.2 Description**

The workshop consists of two parts: 'Differences in educational style' and 'Difficulties/problems'. The main goal of the workshop is to prepare students for a different educational style and open their minds to new ways of teaching and learning.

In the workshop students themselves discover differences in educational styles in discussion with fellow participants. In this way students are not overwhelmed by the new style: they find the differences interesting and frequently continue to discuss them after the workshop.

Letting students explore the differences themselves has an extra advantage: moderators don't need to know the educational style of all the countries represented in the group. Some knowledge of differences in educational styles is sufficient.

During the workshop much time is spent comparing the educational styles of the students' countries. This is to make the students realise that there are many different educational styles and that the style that the student is used to and the style at ITC are just two of many. The most important aspects of the ITC and Dutch educational style are discussed as far as time allows. More comprehensive information about this new style is given in the hand-out distributed at the end of the workshop (appendix 1).

The purpose of the second part of the workshop on 'Difficulties/problems' is to stimulate students to express their fears about what might prove difficult during the course. Although these are described as problems they might have in the future, most students fear these problems already. By sharing them

with fellow participants, they realise that many students (including domestic students) have the same fears. Sharing them now makes it easier to talk about problems when these occur in the future.

At the end of the workshop the students receive the hand-out in appendix 1. This hand-out provides more comprehensive information about the Dutch educational style.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This report describes important aspects of the educational style in the Netherlands, as well as a workshop scenario that could be used to introduce the new style to the students and help them to adapt to it more easily. The results at the Faculty ITC have shown that not only international students but also Dutch students and staff benefit from a proper introduction.

## Literature

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## Appendix 1: Hand-out

# Educational style in the Netherlands

## an introduction for incoming students

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### Expected differences

Now that you are visiting the Netherlands you probably expect to find that many things are different. The Dutch culture and daily life in the Netherlands, including climate, traffic, food, clothes and religion, differ from what you are used to in your home country. You might have heard that the Dutch behave differently or even 'weirdly'. For example, Dutch people find it very important to be on time. Or that you will be served coffee and cookies when you visit someone but are not expected to stay for dinner (unless you have been explicitly invited for dinner).

You may have studied the Dutch education system and you probably expect the content and structure of the study programme and the language of instruction to be different. The course content will focus more on what is relevant for the Netherlands or will offer a more international approach. Most examples and case studies will not come from your country. You will have to work harder to relate the course content to the situation in your own country, and will have to find out how the course content can be applied back home mostly by yourself.

The teaching and course materials will be in English. Since English is not the native language of most lecturers, and probably not yours either, teaching may be less effective and studying less efficient. Lecturers might explain topics less clearly in English than they would do in their mother tongue. You will need more time to understand the lecturer and the materials.

Although the course is in English, when the lecturers find a highly relevant article in Dutch, they may still offer it to the students as non-compulsory study material. Because struggling with English feels awkward, Dutch students may often speak Dutch among themselves – making you feel left out.

You will also find that your entry level differs from that of other students. Perhaps you have already mastered a topic that is new to others; perhaps you will struggle with topics that are a piece of cake for other students, requiring remedial study on your side. Perhaps you have mastered skills that are not required for the course in the Netherlands, whereas you lack some skills that are much needed here. Examples of the latter that are often mentioned are the lack of selective and critical reading skills and academic writing skills.

Being abroad will often make you feel 'different'.

### **Education shock**

What many international students do not expect, however, is that the educational style too is strongly influenced by being abroad and in a different culture. In fact, students at ITC have frequently reported that they had more difficulties during the first few months of the course due to the (unexpected) *education shock* than due to the (expected) culture shock (Ten Dam and Rusman, 1999).

Educational style is the combination of teaching and assessment strategies that are used by the lecturers and the study strategies that are expected from the students. Many students do not realise that courses can be taught in different educational styles and that the style you were used to in your own country probably differs from the one used in your host university. It is easy to make the mistake of entering a study programme in the Netherlands with a set of values and expectations developed in your own country, culture and previous education. This may result in frustration, fear and feeling offended. The challenge is to start with an open mind and postpone judgement.

What are the main characteristics of the Dutch educational style?

### **Relative lack of competition**

Competition hardly plays a role in the Dutch system. Students are seldom graded against one another. Grading is absolute rather than relative. The lecturer sets the minimum score for a pass and based on this minimum score it is possible for all students to pass or only a few (Warman, Nuffic, 2005). Dutch students themselves are scarcely interested in how they rank in class; many are mainly interested in completing the course and passing the exam. A student who does consider class rank to be important and does strive to be the best would not talk about it. In the Netherlands it is not done to be too competitive or to work too hard.

### **Your own opinions**

The Dutch value 'having your own opinion' and 'being critical'. Children are encouraged to develop their own opinions and ideas at a very young age and to take a critical view of things. This is in contrast to other cultures where students have to master existing knowledge before their own opinion is appreciated. In these countries a person said to be critical is seen as someone who always has something negative to say (Ly Tran, 2009). If this is the case in your country, writing a paper may be a big challenge for you. Collecting and summarising information from other authors will not be sufficient. You will have to make your own selection of available information sources, develop your own line of thinking, and include your own conclusions and/or recommendations.

### **Brutal honesty**

Although this may seem to contradict the above, the Dutch system values students who are visible in class, participate in discussions, and show the lecturer how good they are. In view of the high value assigned by the Dutch system to 'having your own opinion' and 'being critical', giving your first

presentation to a group of Dutch students who are expected to comment on your work may prove a difficult experience. They will be direct and say what they think. Honesty is highly valued in the Dutch communication style, and avoiding losing face plays a less important role. Dutch society is rather individualistic and Dutch students act more as individuals. Showing the lecturer and other students how critical they are is seen to be more important than loyalty to other students in the group. Furthermore, the limited English language skills of your fellow students often contribute to what might seem to you to be brutal honesty. They may speak English rather well, but the ability to express one's thoughts politely in English is a skill that is developed rather late in the process of learning the English language.

### **Intercultural friendships**

Because of the above cultural differences, Dutch students may well see students from overseas as passive, easily offended, only memorising and reproducing, highly focused on marks, and dishonest (not saying what they think). On the other hand, overseas students may see Dutch students as noisy in class, disrespectful towards lecturer and classmates, boastful, lazy and negative. It is a challenge for everyone in an international classroom environment to transcend these prejudices and become friends.

### **Social equality**

A fundamental value in Dutch society is the equality of all human beings. Differences in class, wealth, status, sex, age or race are of no influence in the classroom. The son of a major will get the same treatment as the daughter of his secretary. The lecturer and students are also equal; the only relevant differences relate to their respective roles as lecturer and student and to expertise, which the lecturer has and the students as yet do not. This value leads to rather informal contact between lecturers and students.

Calling the lecturer by the first name is acceptable in most institutes. Use of titles is not common. The lecturers will be friendly but the relation is businesslike, not personal, and does not extend beyond office hours. You will be treated as a mature adult, able to take care of yourself and ask for help if needed. If you do not raise any issue, the lecturer will assume that everything is going well.

You see the principle of equality also applied to access to higher education. Everyone who has finished the right secondary school stream will be admitted. For the few studies with limited places, selection is made by the drawing of lots, with bright students (who have had the luck to be born bright) having only a slightly higher chance than average students.

### **Rules are rules**

The importance of rules and regulations is related to the philosophy 'We are all equal'. Dutch society runs on rules. Exceptions to the rules, particularly for individuals, are very rare. Trying to get a higher mark or an exam resit is a waste of time – and you will quickly irritate the lecturer, and even more so

the people higher up in the hierarchy if you try your luck there. For the Dutch, rules are there to guarantee fair and equal treatment for all.

### **Independence**

The lecturer expects student independence. He/she will inform the students what is expected (e.g. written exam three weeks from now on book X and two articles) but will leave the planning to you. In most institutes for higher education you may even choose not to go to lectures if you think that personal study in this instance is more effective than listening to explanations and extra information presented in the lectures. Furthermore, assignments may be more open than you are used to, with few instructions and with space to choose your own approach.

Literature can be studied in different ways, depending on the underlying purpose. Basic texts may be best studied from A to Z. Grasping the main line of thought or studying only those parts relevant to the topic may be sufficient for other texts. You are expected to select the most appropriate study strategy yourself. The same applies to exercises and assignments. Some require detailed completion, others can be put aside once the essence has been mastered and understood and little more can be learnt from finalising the details. You may end up working late on an assignment while all the Dutch students are long gone, leaving you wondering how they were able to finish so fast.

### **Active learning**

The Dutch believe that learning actively is the best way to learn. The essence of active learning is asking yourself questions that you try to answer by studying. What am I going to learn? What do I know already about this question? Does what I read answer my question? Do I agree? What do I miss? Are alternative solutions possible? What are the consequences? Memorising and understanding are seen as valuable techniques but only as a first step in learning. The emphasis is more on the development of academic and/or professional skills.

Students are expected to study actively. This is related to the high value assigned to 'own opinions' and 'being critical' and also leads to interaction in class and has consequences for exams. Exams will usually include a few questions asking for information that is given in a straightforward way in the book. But the questions that get most points are those that ask for insight, application or conclusions that cannot be found literally in the text. The most extreme form is an 'open book exam', where students can bring and use their books.

### **Interaction in class**

Interaction in class is seen as part of good teaching in the Netherlands. Students are expected to think about the presented knowledge, develop and express their own opinions, and look for possible weaknesses in what was presented. Asking questions is seen as being interested in the topic, not as a lack of respect for the lecturer. Moreover, the lecturers will often ask the students questions to check the starting level of the class or to initiate a discussion. Incorrect answers or student contributions may

be corrected in class by other students or by the lecturer. Lecturers appreciate critical discussions. These discussions, the lecturer's questions, and the student contributions, whether good or less good, are seen as tools to help students to understand the presented content. Passionate discussions are usually seen as indicating the high involvement and interest of the students. To the Dutch, it is nothing personal and does not lead to losing face; it is all about the content and optimal learning. Group work, as the ultimate form of active learning, is often carried out. Students are expected to learn from one another, to learn to work together, and to produce better products in a group than individually.

### Grading system

There are many different grading systems in the world, for example from lowest to highest mark, 1 to 5, 1 to 10, 1 to 20, 1 to 100, 5 to 1, F to A. In the Netherlands the marking system is from 1 to 10 (or 1 to 100), with 5.5 or 6 as pass mark. Several other countries use the same marking system but have a lower pass mark, 5 or 4. This does not necessarily mean that courses are tougher in the Netherlands. It can be easier to get 6 in the Netherlands than 4 in another country. It is also possible that both the marking system and the pass mark are the same in your country and in the Netherlands. Even then you have to be careful. A mark of 8 in China is not considered good, since most marks in higher education in China are between 8 and 10. A mark of 8 in the Netherlands is seen as very good, since most marks are between 6 and 8. Only very good students in the Netherlands earn marks higher than 8. Therefore to make a fair comparison between grading systems, you should look at the average percentage of students in higher education who received a certain mark in previous years.

The Netherlands (Nuffic, 2006)			Your country
9.5 - 10	excellent	1 %	
8.5 – 9.4	excellent	5 %	
7.5 – 8.4	very good	23 %	
6.5 – 7.4	good	30 %	
5.5 – 6.4	pass	30 %	
0 – 5.4	fail	11 %	

### Educational styles differ in seven aspects of teaching and learning

Every country, and possibly every institute within that country, has developed its own educational style. ITC uses a model of seven aspects of teaching and learning to describe differences in educational styles. Most of the characteristics of the Dutch educational style as described in this article are visible in these seven aspects. Figure 1 gives an overview of the educational style of most higher education institutes in the Netherlands. It shows aspects of teaching and learning in which the Dutch style may differ from the style you were used to.

- Relation lecturer-student: This relation may be more or less formal and more or less hierarchical.
- Interaction in class: This may range from one-way to two-way to multiple-way communication.

- Relation student-student: This relation much depends on the importance of the group and class versus the importance of the individual members of the group (collectivism versus individualism).
- Regulation of the learning process: Responsibility for what, when and how to learn may range from being the full responsibility of the lecturer to being the full responsibility of the student.
- Aim of learning: Learning may be focused mainly on the understanding of theory or more on the development of professional and/or academic skills.
- Use of resources and media: The availability of laboratories, computers, books and other resources will depend on the budget of the institute, and influences the level of practical skills students are expected to have.
- Assessment and grading: The content and type of assessment will differ in line with the learning aim. Grading systems differ. Grading may range from absolute to relative.

Figure 1 does not show in which direction the style you were used to in previous education differs from that in the Netherlands, but it does inform you of the aspects where you can expect differences.

### **Open mind**

Knowing better what to expect in your host university and how the educational style differs from what you were used to will help you to adapt more easily to your new life as a student in the Netherlands. Still, you may occasionally get frustrated or feel offended by these 'weird' Dutch or their strange educational style. The challenge is to keep an open mind and to postpone judgement. You will gradually discover that things can be done in different ways and that each way can be effective. One way is not necessarily better than the other; they are just different.

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<b>Relation lecturer-student</b>	formal -----x----- informal equal ---x----- hierarchical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Informal contact between lecturers and students.</li> <li>* Calling the lecturers by their first name is acceptable in most institutes; use of titles is uncommon.</li> <li>* Relation is businesslike; does not extend beyond office hours.</li> <li>* Students are treated as mature adults, able to take care of themselves. If you do not raise an issue, the lecturer will assume that everything is going well.</li> <li>* Lecturers can comment on your work while other students are present. (It is nothing personal; it is all about content.)</li> <li>* Students can openly comment on what the lecturer has presented.</li> <li>* Saying 'No' to lecturers is acceptable.</li> </ul>	
<b>Interaction in class</b>	one-way communication -----x----- two-way communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Lecturers ask students questions.</li> <li>* Students' questions in class are welcomed.</li> <li>* Discussions in class are seen as helpful for learning.</li> <li>* Group work is often carried out as a good method of learning, in particular learning from one another.</li> </ul>	
<b>Relation student-student</b>	individualists -----x----- group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* All students are equal: age, status, gender or professional background has no influence.</li> <li>* Students operate individually; loyalty to the students in class is not so important.</li> <li>* When students present their work in class, fellow students will openly comment on it, even friends. (It is nothing personal; it is all about content.)</li> <li>* Being interested in class rank or being (too) competitive is not done.</li> </ul>	
<b>Regulation of the learning process</b>	lecturer -----x----- student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Students are expected to study actively.</li> <li>* Students are expected to study rather independently; to do their own planning.</li> <li>* Students are expected to choose their own reading and study strategies.</li> <li>* Students are expected to decide for themselves when they have done enough.</li> <li>* Lectures are often not compulsory.</li> <li>* Lecturers often switch roles: in some situations they act as an expert; in other situations they act as a coach, helping the students to make their own decisions on what and how to study.</li> <li>* Lecturers will give not only assignments with detailed instructions but also open assignments where the student has to decide what to do and how to do it.</li> </ul>	
<b>Aim of learning</b>	understanding -----x----- professional of theory and/or academic skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Memorising and understanding are seen as valuable techniques but only as the first step in learning. More emphasis is placed on the development of academic and/or professional skills. Students are expected to use the knowledge (apply, combine, select and conclude).</li> <li>* Developing your own opinion and critical attitude towards knowledge is important.</li> </ul>	

<b>Use of resources and media</b>	many -----x----- few
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* There are many practical sessions on computers: one student per computer or students have their own laptop.</li> <li>* Fieldwork equipment is available for practical training.</li> <li>* Students are expected to already have basic practical skills (computer skills, laboratory skills, field skills).</li> <li>* Books are widely available for self-study. Lectures are used to introduce the topic, not to present all content.</li> <li>* More compulsory and recommended literature is available than students can study in the time available. Students are expected to have skills in selecting literature and selecting the relevant sections for detailed study.</li> </ul>	
<b>Assessment and grading</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Exams will consist not only of questions that require knowledge to be reproduced but also of questions that require application, combination, criticism and conclusions.</li> <li>* Exams may be 'closed book' or 'open book'.</li> <li>* Marking system is from 1 to 10 or 1 to 100, with a pass mark of 6 or 60.</li> <li>* Most students get a mark between 6/60 and 8/80.</li> <li>* Grading is absolute, with a fixed minimum score for passing.</li> <li>* Rules are rules. Deviation from grading norms and assessment regulations is rare.</li> <li>* Students are more interested in completing the course and passing the exam than obtaining high marks.</li> </ul>	

*Figure 1: Educational style in higher education in the Netherlands*

## Appendix 2: Workshop 'Education at ITC'

### Preparation

When : Last day of introduction week

Duration : 3.5 hours

Participants : All incoming international students; maximum one-third Dutch students; ideal group size 24 to 48 students.

*Remark:* Maximum one-third of the students should be of the same nationality.

Entry level : Students have already had the 3.5 hour workshop 'Introduction to Dutch culture'.

Moderator : One lecturer, education specialist or study advisor/student counsellor with sufficient experience of international students and at least some knowledge of differences in educational style.

Student seating : Groups of three students of different nationalities, as diverse as possible.

Two groups of three students sit at the same table.

*Guidelines for making groups:*

Three different continents per group works best. When this is not possible, students from different regions can be grouped together (although fewer differences will then be found).

Western countries: North and West Europe

South Europe

East Europe

Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand

Asia:

Southeast and East Asia

South Asia

Former Soviet republics

Arab countries

Mediterranean North Africa and Middle East

Africa

West Africa

East and South Africa

Latin America

Hand-outs : List of statements, list of statements plus score for ITC, hand-out (appendix 1).

Other materials : Slides, table numbers, name cards, whiteboard or flipover, whiteboard marker, five copies of the list of students + nationality + group number.

Room : Tables are arranged to accommodate two groups of three students per table.

### Programme

This workshop introduces ITC students to study and the educational style at ITC. It consists of two sessions: 'Differences in educational style' and 'Difficulties /problems'.

*Preparation of room for the workshop; time for chatting with students (from 10 minutes before the start until most students have arrived).*

Put two group numbers and six cards (for name cards) on each table.  
Students are asked to sit at the table as indicated on the list of students.  
Students are asked to make a name card with:

- first and last name, underlining what the student likes to be called
- name of the country where last education was received.

*Introduction of workshop (5 minutes)*

- Name and position of moderator
- Workshop aims

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To identify differences between<br/>education at ITC<br/>education you were used to in your previous studies<br/>education your fellow participants were used to</li><li>2. To help you to adapt more easily to education at ITC.</li></ol> |
|--|

- Overview of the workshop

## **PART 1**

*Introduction to differences in educational style (20 minutes)*

Moderator presents three problems, one by one. Students are asked to consider what could have caused the problem. Students think about this themselves first, then discuss it in their group of three, and finally are asked for their ideas by the moderator. Once all explanations have been presented, the moderator will explain what really caused the problem.

Preferably the problems should be based on real situations in the institute. Tell students that the nationality of the students mentioned in the examples has been changed.

Three examples of problems:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A few Cuban students think that people here are unfriendly. They say their teachers do their job without seeming to care about them. Nor are their classmates as helpful as those back home.</li><li>• Two students from Vietnam say, 'The teacher doesn't know her business. She keeps asking <i>us</i> for information!'</li><li>• A Moroccan student failed a module. She pleaded with the lecturer to pass her, arguing that her boss would be angry. She also asked other lecturers to intervene on her behalf. She does not understand why the lecturers responded so negatively.</li></ul> |
|---|

The moderator finalises the introduction with a description of the 'educational style': the combination of:

- the way the lecturers teach
- the way you are expected to study
- the way you will be assessed.

*Differences in educational style*

A. Discussion about statements on education (45-60 minutes)

Students get a list with statements on education (see example on page 22, 23). The statements are chosen from the hand-out in appendix 1. Choose statements where you know by experience that this aspect of the educational style is strange or difficult for international students in your institute. Don't select more than 16 statements in total. The intention is that students discover differences between the educational styles of their countries and discuss them.

Instructions for the students:

1. Put a number (1 to 4) in the first column to express how well the statement applies to your previous education.
2. Copy the results of the group members into the remaining columns. Write the name of the country above the column.
3. Choose five statements with the largest difference in results (at least two points difference, e.g. 2-4-4, 1-3-4).
4. Discuss these five statements and explain to your group why the statement was true/not true in your previous studies.

*Break (20 minutes)*

B. Handling differences (30 minutes)

The moderator asks each group to report one difference found (that has not yet been presented by previous groups). The moderator explains how this aspect is handled at ITC. The moderator distributes the list of statements, with the scores for the educational style of own institute.

C. Other aspects of the education system and style of the institute (20 minutes)

The moderator presents a few key characteristics, and students can ask questions. Most groups have questions about assessment. It is particularly important to explain the marking system, the minimum pass mark, common percentages of students per mark, and (number of) exam resits.

## **PART 2**

*Expected problems/difficulties (40 minutes)*

It is explained to the students that it is normal to have difficulties in new situations and new environments. They are asked to make an individual list of problems that they think they might have (2 minutes) and then make a group list of the problems of everyone at their table (10 minutes).

What problems/difficulties do you think you might have when studying at the institute?

The moderator asks each group to mention two problems on the list (which have not yet been mentioned by a previous group). These are listed on the whiteboard or flipover. Each problem mentioned is discussed and some advice is given on how to deal with it.

*Remark:* It is not necessary to 'solve' each problem. Students become aware that fellow students foresee difficulties as well. Advise students not to keep problems to themselves but to talk about what is bothering them with fellow students and/or staff of the institute.

The discussion is brought to a close by showing one or two slides illustrating the problems most often mentioned by students in previous years.

*Closing (5 minutes)*

The moderator

- distributes the hand-out 'Educational style in the Netherlands' (appendix 1)
- expresses his/her hope that students will be open-minded, will adapt their expectations, and will less easily judge the behaviour of others as inappropriate
- announces his/her office number
- wishes the students good luck in their studies and a pleasant time in the Netherlands
- finishes by showing the four slides below.



## Differences in education between countries

Please indicate with a number how well the statement applies to the previous study programme you followed.

1 = True

2 = Mostly true

3 = Mostly not true

4 = Not true at all

Country in which previous study programme was followed: .....

### Relation lecturer – students

name country: .....

	.....	.....	.....
Students should call the lecturer by her title and last name.			
Lecturers will not criticise students' work in the hearing of other students.			
When a student is forced into situations with which he/she does not agree, he/she will say 'yes' without intending to act as requested. Tact is more important than honesty.			
When a lecturer does not know the answer, he/she will make up an answer.			

### Interaction in class

Most lecturers like discussions with students in class. They find it important that students develop and express their own opinions on the subject.			
Students who ask questions during the lecture show that they do not respect the lecturer.			

### Relation between students

Showing what you know to the lecturer and other students in the class is important in education.			
The lecturer will pay special attention to a senior person or a son/daughter of an important official among the students.			

### Learning activities

The lecturer defines the homework, indicating from week to week what should be read.			
Open assignments (where students have to find out for themselves how to do them) are often given.			
The emphasis lies on theory and lectures; application and practical aspects receive less attention.			
Books and copies are scarce. The main materials to be studied for the exam are the notes taken in the lectures.			

### Assessment and grading

All assessments are written exams and always 'closed book'.			
Practical assignments are often marked.			
On a scale of 0-100 the pass mark is 60.			
Most students do not worry about their class rank. Their main goal is to complete the course and pass the exam.			

Example: Hand-out for exercise 'Differences in educational style'