

Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity
An Approach for Teacher Education

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1. Introduction

In modern societies, the existence of globalisation, individualisation, and pluralisation of values and cultural norms is self-evident. Against this background, societal developments such as increasing migration flows and stronger claims for the recognition of cultural minorities are producing new cultural and social constellations. Accordingly, the current educational discourse values ‘diversity’ as a crucial concept and advocates an appropriate consideration of differences regarding culture, gender, or aptitudes. Thereby, recognition and appreciation of diversity constitute overarching aims of education and are seen as basic requirements for democracy and equality in modern societies (Prenzel, 1993).

As central actors in education, teachers play a key role in dealing effectively and constructively with diversity. The main tasks can be seen in two particular areas: *Firstly*, teachers and schools are challenged to provide equal educational opportunities to all their students, as immigrant children and minority group students are often disadvantaged within the school systems. *Secondly*, all school children, regardless of whether they belong to an ethnic minority or an ethnic majority, need to be prepared to live in globalised, pluralistic and culturally diverse societies.

How can teachers be prepared for such a complex task? Clearly, effective preparation in teacher education means dealing appropriately with each individual’s preconditions: i.e. with individuals’ personal dispositions and beliefs regarding intercultural education and cultural diversity. These different beliefs reflect to a large extent different levels of intercultural sensitivity. Different levels of intercultural sensitivity allow a different degree of complexity in the perception of cultural diversity and may explain why different teachers choose different approaches in dealing with cultural diversity. This means for teacher education

*different teachers;
different approaches*

that teachers struggle with different issues and require tailored support depending on their level of intercultural sensitivity.

Teacher educators who facilitate the development of intercultural competence among student teachers and in-service teachers need to know about these differences in order to be effective. Understanding the different levels of intercultural sensitivity can help in selecting the appropriate training units and in supporting the learning process according to the readiness of the learners.

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, DMIS

In order to explain these differences, we refer to the “Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity”, DMIS (Bennett, 1986a), a well elaborated and widely recognised model. On the basis of the DMIS, the diagnosing tool “Intercultural Development Inventory” (IDI) has been developed and repeatedly validated. It can be highly useful in providing insight into the developmental need of, for instance, students, teachers and teacher educators (Hammer, 2009).

DMIS in the school context

The DMIS is not limited to the education field. If its conceptual approach shall be useable for teacher education, its broad scope needs a focus on the specifics of the school context and the particular concerns of teachers. Therefore, from 2011 until 2013, a research project has been conducted in a cooperation of the University of Teacher Education Central Switzerland, Zug (Switzerland), the Institute of Psychology, University of Belgrade (Serbia) and the Faculty of Teacher Education Vranje of the University of Niš (Serbia). In this research project, the level of intercultural sensitivity among teachers in Switzerland and Serbia was examined and specifics of their concerns were analysed (Leutwyler, Mantel, Petrović et al., forthcoming). This research was carried out with an interview questionnaire that included a ‘critical incident’: The interviewed teachers were introduced to a hypothetical school situation and asked about their thoughts on the situation and how they would react in such a situation. A detailed

picture of the diversity of their answers was gained and patterns were scrutinised.

The aim of this contribution is to present an easily readable overview of the DMIS and to illustrate the different levels it describes in school-specific examples. In doing so, we draw on these research results and, for our illustrations, we introduce the same ‘critical incident’ used in the research project. However, we describe the thoughts and reactions of different teachers in a pointed way, highlighting their prototypical features and illustrating them by a short narrative. This way, the typical aspects shall be stressed and related to different levels of intercultural sensitivity.

aim of this book

With the presentation of the DMIS and the school-specific illustrations, we aim to provide a conceptual basis for facilitating intercultural sensitivity by taking into account students’ individual developmental needs and readiness for intercultural learning.

In the *second* chapter, the underlying assumptions of the DMIS shall be explicated as well as the significance of intercultural sensitivity as a prerequisite for intercultural learning. In the *third* chapter, the different stages of the developmental model shall be described, illustrated with school examples, and supplemented by the main developmental challenges that need to be overcome in order to move to the next stage. Finally, in the *fourth* chapter, we close with some concluding remarks on the implications of the DMIS for teacher education.



2. Basic assumptions of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) follows a constructivist approach. In order to understand how student teachers, teachers or teacher educators regard matters of cultural differences and similarities, constructivist approaches ask how an individual's reality is constructed and, more specifically, what frameworks individuals have created in order to understand cultural phenomena.

Theorists of constructivism are guided by the precept that reality is constantly constructed in interactions with others by assigning an individual meaning to an event or experience (e.g. Kelly, 1955; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; von Glasersfeld, 1984). Based on these constructions, we expect other people to act in a certain way and therefore anticipate their behaviour according to the image we have created of them. We build hypotheses upon the way our reality works in order to predict the behaviour of others, and test these hypotheses in an on-going process of constructing and re-constructing. In this process, our worldview is sometimes confirmed and sometimes challenged, the latter case requiring that it is to be enlarged, modified or replaced. We adapt our worldview according to the way we are able to perceive the events and experiences that occur to us and that we react to. Piaget (1970) developed this constructivist epistemology for educational matters and showed how the development of cognition is a constant process of oscillation between assimilation to and accommodation of specific cognitive structures. Against this background, individual cognitions do not *match reality*; individual cognitions rather *fit* the world outside (von Glasersfeld, 1984). Hence, subjective theories as expressions of individuals' cognitions *fit a reality* as long as they are "viable" (ibid., p. 22).

*constructivist
approach*

The DMIS follows this constructivist approach in relation to intercultural issues: “The most basic theoretical concept in the DMIS is that experience (including cross-cultural experience) is constructed” (Bennett, 2004, p. 72); “There is no inherent meaning in the phenomena themselves. People have to ‘make something out of them’” (Bennett, 2005, p. 10). Following this constructivist approach, people ‘make something out of the phenomena’ by using whatever cognitive templates and sets of categories they have at hand to ascribe meaning to the phenomena: “So, for instance, an American person who happens to be in the vicinity of a Japanese event may not have anything like a Japanese experience of that event, if he or she does not have any Japanese categories with which to construct that experience” (Bennett, 2004, p. 73).

*essentialist
understanding
of culture*

Against this background, our perception of the world has to be understood as a subjective construction. Our perception is not an objective picture of ‘reality out there’. In this regard, the basic assumptions of the DMIS are in sharp contradiction to the Newtonian paradigm which assumes the existence of things and phenomena aside from their descriptions. This means that, with regard to ‘culture’, the Newtonian paradigm conceives relatively stable and discriminable ‘cultural’ groups, each following its own ‘culturally’ bound rules. In this sense, ‘culture’ is often seen as something that can be objectively defined (Bennett, 2005; Wicker, 2012, p. 228). This essentialist notion of ‘culture’ implies an understanding of intercultural learning that is mainly based on acquisition of specific and declarative knowledge about a ‘given culture’. This approach underlies the still wide-spread practice of ‘area studies’ that pretend to provide intercultural learning by giving only information about a target ‘culture’. However, this is at most ‘learning about culture’, but not intercultural learning in the sense of the DMIS.

In contrast to this essentialist understanding of ‘culture’, the DMIS follows a constructivist understanding of ‘culture’. It attributes the

human world as a product of human beings and assigns the authorship of perceptions and experiences to each individual (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). With this approach, 'culture' is seen as patterns of behaviour that emerge in interactions and that are modified constantly in on-going interactions. Thereby, collective patterns arise which do not express an independently existing 'culture' in the Newtonian sense, but which are instead constantly created in dynamic occurrences (Bennett, 2005; Reckwitz, 2005; Wimmer, 2005).

*constructivist
understanding that
culture is constantly
created through
dynamic processes*

In such a constructivist understanding of 'culture', mere knowledge of 'culture' is only of limited benefit. Productive behaviour in intercultural situations implies, in this sense, appropriate and target-aimed interactions which adequately consider the interests of all involved parties. Therefore, from a constructivist perspective, intercultural learning is seen as increasing experience with different patterns of behaviour and with modifications of these patterns in on-going interactions: Intercultural learning implies an increasing awareness of cultural differences and similarities and a growing sensitivity of the cultural imprints of one's own perceptions.

This kind of learning means an increase in complexity: Perceptions of phenomena can take place at different levels of sophistication and complexity. This complexity refers to sets of categories that are used to organise the perception of phenomena. According to Bennett (2004, p. 73) "more cognitively complex individuals are able to organize their perceptions of events into more differentiated categories." He adds that this ability usually refers to particular domains:

*development
as an increase in
cognitive complexity*

For instance a wine connoisseur may be able to taste the difference between two vintages of the same variety of red wine, while a lay drinker may only be able to differentiate red wine from white wine. So a sophisticated sojourner can observe subtle differences in nonverbal behavior or communication style, while a naïve traveler may notice only differences in the money, the food, or the toilets.

As categories for cultural difference become more complex and sophisticated, perception becomes more interculturally sensitive. (ibid., p. 73)

In this sense, an increasing complexity in perceiving cultural phenomena is seen as the basis of intercultural learning: Intercultural learning is not primarily about learning facts about other cultures, it is rather about developing more sophisticated categories to ‘understand’ how others perceive the world. Thus, intercultural learning is a development in complexity, meaning intercultural learning is development of intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity reflects the complexity with which someone perceives cultural phenomena.

*intercultural sensitivity
as precondition for
intercultural
competence*

Against this background, intercultural sensitivity is the basic precondition for acting with intercultural competence: It “creates the potential for increased intercultural competence” (Bennett, 2004, p. 73). In order to act in an interculturally competent way, some culture-specific and situation-specific knowledge is required. Furthermore, certain attitudes and beliefs (such as tolerance, respect, or concern for social justice) must stimulate the motivation to act in consideration of different and unfamiliar perspectives. And, moreover, motivational orientations should allow for actively and persistently engaging in challenging intercultural situations. However, without the basic precondition of intercultural sensitivity, all these facets of intercultural competence cannot be implemented in a coherent way, because the specific situation is not perceived appropriately.

Therefore, the DMIS conceives of intercultural learning as a development of more sophisticated worldviews: as a development of more complex categories for the perception of the world. The way the DMIS conceptualises this development is described in more detail in the next chapter.

3. The five stages of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) describes a continuum in a development process aimed at increasing sensitivity towards cultural difference. Bennett (2004, p. 62) has observed a major change in the quality of experience as people become more interculturally sensitive. He calls it a change from *ethnocentrism* to *ethnorelativism*. An ethnocentric worldview implies that one's own culture is experienced as central to reality. The beliefs and behaviours received in one's primary socialisation remain unquestioned within this worldview and are experienced as "just the way things are". In contrast to ethnocentrism, an ethnorelative worldview implies that one's beliefs and behaviours are experienced as just one organisation of reality among many other possibilities.

*intercultural learning:
a process on a
developmental
continuum*

Additionally, five distinct kinds of experience have been defined that are distributed across the continuum from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative worldview. The most ethnocentric stage, called 'denial' of cultural difference, is followed by 'polarisation'. The middle of the continuum is named 'minimisation' of cultural difference and is a transitional stage leading to the two more ethnorelative orientations of 'acceptance' and 'adaptation' (Bennett, 2004; Hammer, 2009). The five stages shall now be presented in detail.

*from an ethnocentric
to an ethnorelative
perspective*

In presenting the five stages, we will provide a school example to illustrate the typical reactions of different teachers at different stages of development. For this example, we use a 'critical incident' – as mentioned above – a school situation, such as a teacher may expect to encounter during his or her everyday life:

The story of Samir and Ibrahim

It is eleven o'clock in the morning. The teacher is just about to begin a sports lesson with a fifth grade class. The teacher plans to introduce the team game of 'netball' as this game will be played at a big sports event with all classes of the school. This sports event will take place in a week's time and it is important to the teacher that all students know and practise the game and its rules in preparation for the event. However, at the beginning of the sports lesson, the teacher notices that two of her students, Ibrahim and Samir, have not put on their sports clothes. The two boys come to the teacher and explain that they are not able to take part in the sports activities. They explain that it is Ramadan, so they have not drunk or eaten and they are not able to do any sports. After school, at five o'clock, the teacher walks through town and sees the two Muslim boys together with some school friends drinking coke and eating kebabs.

In the presentation of the five stages, we will use this same situation throughout all the stages and explain the various reactions of different teachers according to their stage of development.

Each stage shall first be introduced with a general description. Secondly, it shall be illustrated with the example of Samir's and Ibrahim's story and a teachers' reaction which is typical for the specific stage. These illustrations of typical teachers' reactions will be reflected upon and explicated within the framework of the DMIS. Thirdly, we point out the developmental needs that enable a teacher to progress to the next stage.



Figure 1: The Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (adapted from Hammer, 2009, p. 204).

3.1 Denial

General description

The DMIS assumes that in the early ethnocentric stage of ‘denial’, other cultures are either not noticed at all or are constructed in rather vague ways. Consequently, cultural differences are either not experienced or are associated with an undifferentiated concept of *other* such as “foreigner” or “immigrant”. Typically, individuals who view the world through a denial template are disinterested in cultural differences even if they are brought to their attention. They are likely to avoid the issue of diversity altogether if they can. If it impinges on them, they may even react aggressively to deny the existence of a difference. Such a worldview may persist in the isolation of a rather homogeneous group or due to an intentional social separation (Bennett, 2004, p. 63; 2011).

An example would be a neighbourhood populated exclusively by members of a dominant ethnic group. The moment immigrants or minority group members are introduced to the neighbourhood, some people may react with angry bewilderment, asking “How can such a thing happen to our community?” Another example would be an exchange student posted to a small and rather isolated U.S. town. Throughout her stay in this town, she notices that nobody seems genuinely interested in the way she is culturally different.

*inability to construct
cultural differences*

She feels that she is simply expected to be nice (insofar as American cultural terms dictate) and that is all anyone seemingly wants – and is probably able – to see. Another manifestation would be the implicit use of genetic or social Darwinism, whereby a kind of “natural superiority” of the dominant group is posited, while there may be an attitude of benign neglect towards people lower in the social hierarchy. Societal power relations exist largely at a subliminal level for people at this stage. If such issues are addressed head-on in an effort to raise awareness for inequality issues, they

may be met with incomprehension or even hostility (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 154; Bennett, 1986b, p. 34; 2004, p. 63).

A school example

The typical features of somebody's behaviour in the denial stage shall now be illustrated within the school context. Let us imagine a teacher – “Olivia” – who is confronted with the situation during a sports lesson as described above: She plans to introduce the rules of netball to her students in order to prepare them for the forthcoming sports event. However, Ibrahim and Samir, two of her students, approach her saying that they won't be able to participate because of their Ramadan practice of fasting. Olivia is in the denial stage of her development of intercultural sensitivity and reacts in the following way:

When Ibrahim and Samir approach Olivia with their request for dispensation, she says to them: “Why didn't you inform me earlier? You will need to know the rules of netball next week, you see. We need you for the game just like everybody else. You really should participate and not leave your class mates alone with it, just because of something like that. So, what can we do now? I can't let you do sports if you haven't drunk or eaten anything. Well, sit down on the bench for the moment, listen to my introduction of the rules and watch the game from there, and we'll see later, what we can do.”

After the sports lesson, Olivia thinks about different options for rearranging her plans around the forthcoming event. She is annoyed that she has all that hassle. She decides to ring up the boys' parents for further information and says to Ibrahim and Samir: “I will contact your parents and discuss the issue with them.”

At noon, Olivia calls the two boys' parents and says: “This morning your son told me that he isn't able to do any sports during Ramadan. I knew nothing about that. Could you please inform me in advance if something like this happens? You see, we have a sports event next week and it would be nice if your boy could participate together with all his class mates. How long will this Ramadan go on? And is there anything else that I should know? What exactly is your son not allowed to do? Does it affect any other

subjects apart from sports?” Olivia is happy to hear from the boys’ parents that Ramadan would be over in only five days, meaning that Ibrahim and Samir will be able to participate on the event day. Additionally, she is relieved to hear that the sports activities were the only part of the school routine that will be affected. She deems this tolerable, but thinks: “If this had lasted longer, I would have told them that their boys should really take part in such an important school event.”

In the late afternoon, she goes into town and sees Ibrahim and Samir with some friends drinking coke and eating kebabs. Olivia is puzzled somehow and asks herself: “Have they seen me at all?” Realising that they hadn’t noticed her, she is rather relieved and crosses the street to the other side, thinking: “That’s a bit strange, but this is happening during their leisure time, so actually, it’s none of my business.”

Reflections on the story

Reflecting on Olivia’s reaction, it is evident that she is mainly preoccupied with organisational and practical concerns, rather than questions of culture: Her emphasis lies on maintaining the school routine despite such an incident, which she perceives as an interruption of the routine. Regarding the approaching school event, she would have preferred to have been informed earlier, as the organisation would have been easier. She stresses the importance for the two boys to take part in the group activity, which she also considers to be part of the usual school routine. She does not appreciate the boys’ reasoning, but she grants them temporary dispensation for practical and safety reasons as she does not want to risk an accident.

***focus on the
maintenance
of school routine***

Olivia is rather annoyed to have all that “hassle” because of a seemingly unimportant triviality. In fact, if it had not been for practical considerations, she may not have granted the boys’ request at all.

When Olivia calls the boys' parents, she makes her request for early information primarily to facilitate her job to maintain the school routine and event organisation. In order to prevent further disturbances and unforeseen surprises, she asks for more information on the timeframe and the possibility of further restrictions due to Ramadan practice. Concerned solely with the maintenance of the school routine, she considers five days to be rather near the limit of what she finds tolerable.

In the afternoon, when she sees Ibrahim and Samir eating and drinking, she notices the contradiction to their reasoning in the morning, but does not find it necessary to address the issue, as it is happening in their leisure time and is therefore “none of her business”. In fact, she seems to be rather relieved when she realises that the two boys had not seen her, as this way she is not obliged to address an issue that she may not be interested in or she may also prefer to avoid.

Typical aspects according to the DMIS

In the denial stage of the DMIS, other cultures are typically not noticed at all or are constructed in rather vague ways. Olivia's reaction illustrates this perspective as she interprets the situation with hardly any reference to culture. Instead, she constructs the incident as something that interferes with her plans, as an interruption of the routine or as a practical problem that needs to be resolved by organisational measures. Consequently, she emphasises the importance of early information and assesses the tolerability of such an interruption on the level of its disturbance to the school routine. Her inability to perceive culture and her tendency to avoid cultural issues is also apparent in her speech. Speaking of Ramadan, she uses vague expressions: “something like that”, “how long will this Ramadan go on” and is glad, when “it” is over. The tendency to avoid cultural issues becomes particularly apparent in the second half of the incident,

other cultures are not noticed or constructed in vague ways

“I don't need to know”

when she comes across the two boys in town. Seeing them eating and drinking raises questions regarding their reasoning for sports dispensation beyond practical concerns – questions that could not be addressed without enquiring into the cultural context. However, Olivia is glad that Ibrahim and Samir have not seen her and she does not need to address them. She crosses the street to the other side. “I don’t need to know”, is the typical approach of denial.

Developing beyond ‘denial’

In order to move beyond the denial stage, people need to overcome the tendency to avoid noticing or confronting cultural differences. They need to recognise the simple fact that other cultures exist. Facilitators to this development – educators, teachers or friends – need to understand that denial is not (usually) a *refusal* to “confront the facts”. Instead, it is (most often) an *inability* to make the perceptual distinctions that would allow cultural facts to be recognised. To support the recognition of cultural difference, the creation of simple categories for particular cultures should be encouraged, for instance by investigating cultural particularities through films, literature or music. Carefully facilitated cross-cultural contacts can also help overcome this stage. However, such activities need to be undertaken with courage and commitment as the first reaction is likely to be one of increased tension which may set up the conditions for the experience of the next stage, ‘polarisation’ (Bennett, 1986b, p. 36; 2004, p. 64).

*need to recognise
existence
of other cultures*



3.2 Polarisation

General description

In the stage of ‘polarisation’, perceptions are organised and polarised in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. People with a polarising perspective have become more adept at discriminating differences, to the extent that they experience cultural differences as more real than people in denial. However, they do so in a stereotypical way which can either take the form of a ‘defence’ perspective or a ‘reversal’ perspective (Hammer, 2009).

‘us’ versus ‘them’

While people in the stage of polarisation recognise cultural difference better than people in the stage of denial, they also feel a need to protect their own culture. As a result, people in a state of ‘defence’ feel more openly threatened by cultural differences than people in denial (Bennett, 2004, p. 65). Their world is structured into “us” and “them” and the felt threat may be countered by a strategy of denigration or superiority. *Denigration* is a form of negative stereotyping, whereby negative characteristics are attributed to every single member of a distinct group. These characteristics may be fundamentally attached to assumed indicators such as race, religion or gender. With the strategy of *superiority* one’s own culture is constructed to be superior, the most “evolved” form of civilisation or at least as the only good way to live, while other cultures are seen to be inferior (Bennett, 1986b, pp. 37-38).

‘defence’: protecting one’s own culture by declaring it superior and denigrating the other

Members of a dominant group may deal differently with the threat than members of a non-dominant group. Members of a *dominant group* are likely to experience cultural differences as an attack on their values – values which others often perceive as privileges – and they may complain claiming, “Immigrants are taking all our jobs.” Typically, they apply negative stereotypes to others and have a full

stock of jokes about the assumed failings of other cultures. In a more benign form, they may attempt to “help” members of an assumedly inferior group by bringing them into the dominant culture. Such an orientation can for instance be found in descriptions of mentoring programmes, masked in politically correct rhetoric. Members of a *non-dominant group* are more likely to experience this stage as solidifying a separate cultural identity, also applying positive stereotypes to their own group and negative stereotypes to other cultures. For instance, from their point of view, members of the dominant group may all be seen as intentionally engaged in oppression (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 154; Bennett, 2004, p. 65).

As an example, in the international domain, defence is a predominant orientation of “nation-building”. The polarised worldview may be expressed in statements such as “You are either with us or against us” as uttered by many world leaders. Other examples, in which a polarised worldview becomes evident, can be found among travellers who complain about unfamiliar food which is “not like ours”. They may also say “I wish these people would just talk the way we do” or “Even though I’m speaking their language, they are still rude to me” (Bennett, 2004, p. 65; 2011).

However, a polarisation worldview can also be experienced as ‘reversal’, whereby an adopted culture is seen as superior compared to the culture of one’s primary socialisation. With this experience,

‘reversal’: declaring another culture as superior while maligning one’s own

one’s original culture becomes the target of criticism, and the adopted culture the focus of esteem. The stereotypical simplification and dualistic thinking remains the same, but the poles are reversed. Such a perspective is common among exchange students or expatriates who may say, for instance: “These people are so urbane and sophisticated, not like the superficial people back home” or “I am embarrassed by my compatriots, so I spend all my time with the host country nationals” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 154; Bennett, 2004, p. 66; 2011).

A school example

An illustration of a typical behaviour that derives from a polarisation perspective shall now be given for the school context. Let us imagine the teacher “Barbara”, who – like Olivia in the stage of denial – faces the situation of the two boys asking for sports dispensation because of Ramadan. Barbara reacts in the following way:

Her initial reaction is: “Here we go! Another problem with these Muslims. I really don’t understand how parents can do something like that to their children. These poor kids. Let me see what I can do for them.” She decides to clarify this issue in a private conversation with the two boys and takes them aside while the other students are beginning to play around in the sports hall with some netballs. Barbara says to Ibrahim and Samir: “You know, I’m aware of the fact that your parents expect you to follow the Ramadan rules and fast with your family. But, you see, we are not in a Muslim country and here, it is not necessary for you to fast. You are still children and it is totally okay if you at least drink a little bit, so that you can do sports normally, just like all the others. You don’t need to have a bad conscience about that.”

At the end of the sports lesson, Barbara addresses Ibrahim and Samir again: “I will call your parents today and explain to them that it is very important for you to participate in the sports event.”

At noon, Barbara makes the first phone call: “This morning, Ibrahim came to me and told me that he wasn’t able to do any sports during Ramadan. You see, it is very important for his integration, that he can take part in group activities like this forthcoming event. Couldn’t you allow him to eat and drink at least a little bit, so that he can participate? I think you should realise that it is very difficult for him if he is being excluded.” When she hears from the parents that the boys are not allowed to drink and eat during the day, she thinks: “I should have known that they are not cooperative at all. They are always so rigid about their religion and don’t even make an effort to adapt. No wonder their children have problems integrating. These poor children.”

In the late afternoon, when Barbara goes into town and sees the two boys eating and drinking, she is not surprised: “There we go! That’s what I thought: Ramadan fasting is not what they want to do. They are just doing it

to please their parents, but they obviously prefer to be like their peers.” Barbara sees no reason to address the boys about what she has seen, but makes up her mind not to give in to future requests for sports dispensation because of Ramadan fasting.

Reflections on the story

Reflecting on Barbara’s reaction, some main features should be pointed out: Barbara immediately refers to the group as “the Muslims” and applies her stereotypical idea of “Muslims” onto the two boys and their families: “Oh yes, again a problem with these Muslims”. Yet, she immediately makes a distinction between the parents and the children. For Barbara, the boys’ parents are the ones that clearly belong to a different cultural group. In this case, she calls the group “the Muslims”. (The group may equally have been “the Tamils” or “the Roma”). From her point of view however, their children are the ones that potentially belong to two cultural groups: to “the others” as well as to “us”. With her spontaneous thought “these poor kids”, Barbara expresses her very clear idea that these children need her help to integrate. To her, helping them means teaching them how to behave in “our” group. She thinks that this situation may imply an uncomfortable feeling for the two boys, a feeling of being different and potentially excluded from “the group”. To ease this awkward feeling, Barbara takes them aside in a more private space and intends to give them some directions on how to deal with the dilemma: by persuading them to “at least drink a little bit, so that you can do sports normally, just like all the others”.

When Barbara contacts their parents, her requests follow the same logic: She asks the parents to bend the rules of Ramadan fasting a little bit in order to facilitate the boys’ integration. The answer that she perceives (probably the given answer was more differentiated than what Barbara perceived), confirms her stereotypical idea of “the Muslims” being rigid in their religious practice, uncooperative and not ready to

***perceiving parents’
behaviour as typical for
their group – in this
case “the Muslims”***

adapt even a little bit, while from her perspective, their adaptation to what she perceives as the “normal” behaviour would be the solution to the problem.

Barbara’s encounter with the boys in the afternoon serves only to confirm what she has already concluded: It is not the boys’ wish to do something like Ramadan fasting. They are only doing it because of their family – and therefore cultural group – obligations. Instead, they prefer to be like their peers and belong to their peers’ group. Barbara feels more determined in her strategy to help them become more “like us”.

Typical aspects according to the DMIS

In the polarisation stage of the DMIS, perceptions are organised into groups of “us” versus “them” and stereotypical ideas of cultures are applied. Both these typical features guide Barbara’s reaction. Additionally, she is an illustration of a member of the dominant cultural group of the country – as teachers most often are – who regards other groups as inferior. She acts within the logic of a ‘defence’ perspective, looking down on other groups by using negative stereotypes for them. Consequently, she understands that her role as teacher implies helping the children from assumedly inferior groups to become members of the dominant culture, and thus to become “normal” or “like us”. But Barbara’s strategy is only one approach among many. She addresses the perceived problem upfront and tells Ibrahim and Samir not to follow the Ramadan practice. Other teachers, fearing to offend the Muslim family, may remain passive in their action and so avoid a potential conflict, while the underlying logic of perception remains the same. Others again may not have a ‘defence’ perspective within the polarisation stage as Barbara does, but instead a ‘reversal’ perspective. With a ‘reversal’ perspective, an adopted culture is seen as superior compared to the culture of one’s primary socialisation. But even with this ‘reversal’ perspective, the perceptions are polarised in terms of dualistic thinking and stereotypical simplification.

*applying
stereotypes*

Developing beyond 'polarisation'

*need to recognise
the common humanity
of all people*

Overcoming polarisation involves the recognition of the common humanity shared by people of other cultures. Tendencies towards an “us versus them” polarisation need to be mitigated. To facilitate this process it may not be helpful to address the oversimplification of stereotypes by trying to introduce a more sophisticated understanding of difference, since in so doing, it is likely that facilitators will fall prey to the polarised worldview and themselves become further evidence of the “evils” of multiculturalism. Excessive discussion on cultural differences may backfire, leading people to adopt a more intensely defensive stance towards their own culture. To resolve the issues of polarisation, it is necessary to stress aspects that are “equally good but perhaps different” to establish commonality. It is helpful to provide a safe context, avoid cultural contrasts and encourage the investigation of human similarities. This way, the tensions around cultural differences can be relaxed and the perspective can be shifted from “us versus them” towards “They are not so bad after all”. Commonalities may be found in common interests such as career success, music or sports and will help to overcome polarisation and move developmentally towards the next stage on the continuum, the stage of ‘minimisation’ (Bennett, 2003, p. 162; Bennett, 1986b, p. 40; 2004, p. 66).

3.3 Minimisation

General description

The ‘minimisation’ of cultural differences can be seen as a transitional stage leading from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. However, minimisation is ethnocentric to a large extent. It is a complex strategy for avoiding acknowledgement of cultural differences by assuming “Deep down, we are all the same”. This assumption of a basic commonality counteracts the stereotypical simplifications of polarisation, as others are now perceived to be as equally complex as oneself. However, they are perceived to be complex *in the same manner* as oneself. This means that the ethnocentrically generated categories are applied to all cultures. The ethnocentric worldview is protected by attempting to subsume differences into familiar superordinate categories. For example, the similarity may be emphasised referring to the similar biological nature of people. This kind of *physical universalism* may then be generalised to other assumedly natural phenomena such as needs and motivations. It may also be assumed that typologies of learning styles or the capitalistic concept of “individual achievement” apply equally well in all cultures. Apart from physical universalism, similarity can also be stressed in terms of a *transcendent universalism*. This notion is manifest in the expressions “Everyone is a child of God” and “Everyone has a karma”. Such universal absolutes are almost always derived from one’s native culture. Minimisation is an attempt to “bury” cultural differences under the weight of cultural similarities. This way, cultural differences are obscured and consequently may be trivialised or romanticised at minimisation (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 155; Bennett, 1986b, p. 42; 2004, pp. 66-67). People who are operating at minimisation are often insistently nice. Religious, moral or political principles may be actively supported. However, especially people of

*minimising differences
and assuming a basic
commonality among all
human beings*

dominant cultures lack an awareness of their own culture. They may not realise their privileges due to unequal power relations and may overestimate their appreciation of other cultures (Bennett, 2004, p. 67).

For instance, a person in minimisation may not be able to comprehend a communication style as a cultural pattern. Consequently, he or she may think that everyone uses the same style unless they lack social skills or choose to be “alternative”. Both of these explanations miss the point that other people may be using a different communication style due to cultural differences (Bennett, 2004, p. 67). Typically, people in the minimisation stage say “The key to getting along in any culture is just be yourself – authentic and honest.” or “Customs differ, of course, but when you really get to know them, they’re pretty much like us” (Bennett, 2011).

A school example

To illustrate these typical characteristics within the school context we introduce an imagined “Sandy” as our typical teacher in the minimisation stage. Sandy is facing the same situation as Olivia (denial) and Barbara (polarisation) at the beginning of her sports lesson and she reacts in the following way:

When Ibrahim and Samir ask Sandy for an exemption from the sports lesson due to their Ramadan fasting practice, Sandy immediately responds to their request and says: “Okay, that’s not a problem, just sit on the bench, listen to my introduction of the rules and watch the game from there.” She thinks: “I would prefer them to take part in the game, but it is important to respect their religious feelings.”

During the sports lesson she keeps thinking about different consequences for the boys if they practised Ramadan fasting over a longer period of time: “It’s okay if they have to skip one sports lesson, but what happens if their fasting affects their learning? If they don’t eat and drink, will they be able to concentrate? For instance, in the maths lesson? And can a school give permission for such a behaviour? Maybe for once, yes, but we need to make sure that the parents understand the importance of health for learning and

concentration.” Sandy decides to confer with the school’s headmaster about her ideas before she takes any action.

At noon, Sandy consults the headmaster to make certain that her decision is in line with the general school regulations. Afterwards, she calls the boys’ parents: “Your son told me this morning that he was not able to participate in sports activities during Ramadan. I respect your religious feelings, but please understand that we have to care about his learning. If he fasts all day, it will be very difficult for him to concentrate. In the best interests of your child, you should think about reducing the religious demands and meeting the school obligations. They really are essentially important for all of us.”

In the late afternoon, when Sandy discovers the two boys eating and drinking in town with their friends, she feels disappointed. “I have been tolerant towards them, respected their religious feelings and arranged an exception for them, and now, this is what they do.” She approaches the boys and asks them directly: “I gave you permission for an exception from your school obligations, and now, this is what you do. I want an explanation.”

Reflections on the story

Reflecting on Sandy’s behaviour, an underlying logic can be seen: Sandy immediately responds to the boys’ request, claiming that it is “important to respect their religious feelings”. She regards herself as tolerant and respectful towards other cultures and demonstrates this attitude by agreeing with the boys’ request.

However, during the sports lesson, she thinks about consequences for Ibrahim and Samir if Ramadan fasting was practised over a longer period of time: If they do not eat and drink, they may not be able to concentrate and learn, particularly in subjects that are most relevant for their educational success, such as mathematics. From Sandy’s point of view, these questions affect a part of school that she considers to be more important than cultural particularities and religious practice. She understands striving for educational success to be something that is “important to all of us”, something “we all” have in common –

***regarding oneself as
tolerant and respectful
towards other cultures***

beyond any cultural differences. For Sandy, the school regulations are a kind of objective operationalisation of this common interest and in order to make certain that she argues in line with these regulations, she confers with the school headmaster whom she regards as the representative of the school and its regulations.

*emphasising
commonality: valuing
educational success
as more important
than cultural
particularities*

After having consulted the headmaster, Sandy calls the boys' parents and communicates to them what she considers to be something objectively validated: She stresses her tolerance for their culture, and at the same time points out the importance of nutrition for concentration and educational success. While she agrees on making an exception for the boys regarding the sports lesson in the morning, she insists on the higher importance of concentration and learning for which – “in the best interests of the child” – strict fasting during Ramadan should be given up.

Interestingly, Sandy is not very interested in the parents' part of the conversation. Having stressed the common interest that “all of us” share, she does not expect an argument that could counter her point substantially.

In the afternoon, when she discovers the two boys eating and drinking, she feels disappointed. From her perspective, she made quite an effort to think about an appropriate exception, to find a special solution to a problem that was affecting something as important as the common interest of educational success, while maintaining tolerance towards cultural and religious considerations. Discovering that her efforts – made “in the best interests of the child” – are not appreciated by the boys, Sandy feels compelled to address the boys about their inconsistent behaviour. Sandy wants to teach them that the cultural tolerance being offered to them should be met with respect from their side as well.

Typical aspects according to the DMIS

In the minimisation stage of the DMIS, cultural differences are perceived in a more differentiated way than in the stages of denial

and polarisation and it is met with more tolerance. Sandy perceives the Ramadan fasting practice as a cultural difference that needs to be respected and tolerated. At the same time, however, she perceives it as something that interferes with a shared commonality that she regards as even more important: the common interest of striving for learning achievement and educational success. Emphasising the common ground can be seen as a strategy to minimise the significance of cultural difference and is typical of the stage of minimisation. Furthermore, it is typical that this commonality is defined ethnocentrically, according to one's own frame of reference. This ethnocentric orientation, however, usually goes unseen. Sandy does not expect a counter-argument from the parents since she takes for granted that the commonality of educational success, as it is defined by her and approved by the school representative, is an objective commonality that everybody should agree on. Consequently, people in the minimisation stage usually overestimate their tolerance, and this again is not recognised: Sandy genuinely intends to be tolerant and respectful and she expects the boys' appreciation in return.

commonality is ethnocentrically defined and one's own tolerance is overestimated

Developing beyond 'minimisation'

The resolution of minimisation is to be found with the missing piece: the recognition of one's own culture. Cultural self-awareness needs to be gained and culture needs to be experienced as a context. Only when someone can see that all beliefs, behaviours and values are at least influenced by a particular context, can alternative contexts be fully imagined (Bennett, 2004, p. 68). Theoretical frameworks such as that of Hofstede (2001) can provide a useful basis for analysing different cultures, especially one's own.

Between this stage and the next stage is a "paradigmatic barrier". This major change entails a conceptual shift from reliance on absolute principles of some kind to an acknowledgement of a non-absolute relativity. This shift entails a basic reorientation and a

*shift from
an ethnocentric
to an ethnorelative
perspective*

corresponding phase of disorientation and confusion is likely to occur. To overcome this phase, it may be helpful to understand that the awareness of cultural relativity is highly significant for effective intercultural communication. Additionally, it may be helpful for trainers simply to acknowledge any confusion felt in order to prevent learners from easing the tension by retreating to earlier ethnocentric stages (Bennett, 1986b, pp. 45-46).

3.4 Acceptance

General description

The following two DMIS orientations are defined as more ethno-relative, meaning that people experience their own culture in the context of other cultures. With the ‘acceptance’ of cultural differences, one’s own culture is experienced as just one of many other equally complex worldviews. People begin to interpret the behaviour of other people within their particular cultural context and categories are consciously elaborated. This way, cultural differences are both acknowledged and respected and the existence of differences is accepted as a human condition. In contrast to the previous stages, not only can others’ cultural differences be discerned, but, by developing a self-reflexive perspective, one’s own cultural particularities can be appreciated too (Bennett, 1986b, p. 47; 2004, p. 68; 2011).

*being able to
discriminate
cultural differences:
others’ and one’s own*

For example, a person in the acceptance stage may say: “The more difference the better – more difference equals more creative ideas” or “The more cultures you know about, the better comparisons you can make” or “Sometimes it’s confusing, knowing that values are different in various cultures and wanting to be respectful, but still wanting to maintain my own core values” (Bennett, 2011).

A school example

For an illustration in the school context, we introduce “Jennifer”, a teacher in the stage of acceptance in her development of intercultural sensitivity, who has to react to the two boys’ request:

Hearing Ibrahim’s and Samir’s reasoning, Jennifer starts thinking about their cultural context. In her mind, she considers different possibilities of scenarios that might be the reason for the two boys to come up with their

request: “Oh yes, it’s Ramadan at the moment, I knew about this – and these boys have told me before about their Muslim faith. I understand that from their perspective, this may be something important to them and strict fasting can have a priority. But actually, both these families have appeared not to follow such rules very strictly – so do the boys maybe want to avoid something? Do they use the issue of Ramadan as an excuse? But what for? Or – it may also be different, it could be that they have a relative visiting, maybe an uncle from Tunisia, the one that attaches a lot of importance to strict Ramadan fasting practice so that the whole family adapts to his priorities this year. Shall I ask the boys about it? But will they feel comfortable telling me?” Jennifer decides to have a careful go and asks the boys: “You take part in Ramadan fasting? Tell me about it. What do you do? What is it like for you?” When Jennifer realises that Ibrahim and Samir are rather hesitant to tell her more, she decides to leave the issue for the moment. “Okay, then, you can sit on the bench for now, listen to my introduction of the rules and watch the game from there.”

During the sports lesson, Jennifer thinks about a nice chance to have a class conversation on the issue, as she thinks, this would be very interesting for the other students to learn about. But as the boys seemed to be reluctant to talk openly, she decides to approach the issue with caution and wait for an appropriate opportunity.

At noon, Jennifer still weighs up different reasons for the boys’ request: “I wonder, what they are doing exactly and what it is like for the boys. I wish I knew more about the context. What if they only use it as an excuse? It would be a shame if they couldn’t take part in the sports event. But shall I contact their parents about it? No, this would create an atmosphere of distrust, I better wait and see.”

In the late afternoon, Jennifer walks into town and sees the two boys with their friends eating and drinking. “Oh, that’s interesting. Have they given up their fasting? Or have they been tricking me? I wonder what’s going on here. Should I inform the parents?” Jennifer realises that the boys have not seen her, so there is no immediate need to address the issue. She decides to confer with a friend of hers and discuss what she can do in such a case.

Reflections on the story

Reflecting on Jennifer's response to the situation, some details should be pointed out: Jennifer immediately starts differentiating. She is aware that the boys argue from a point of view that she knows only in part. She has talked with them about their cultural background and their cultural knowledge before, and she weighs up different reasons for their request. She is aware of the fact that, depending on the actual reason, her questioning may provoke different reactions and she respects the boys' hesitation at that moment. She realises that she would need to know more before she could decide on the appropriate measure.

intending to understand the boys' request within their cultural context

At the same time, she thinks about ways to use the boys' cultural knowledge for the other students to learn about cultural differences such as Ramadan and the way it is observed in these two particular families. Jennifer considers calling the boys' parents, but here again she realises that, depending on the background, contacting them may also create an atmosphere of distrust, so she decides to "wait and see".

Her reaction is similar in the afternoon. When Jennifer observes the two boys in town, she gains an additional piece of information, but is still reluctant to call their parents as this may again be perceived as an indication of distrust. She therefore decides to seek additional information and advice from a friend first. Jennifer's awareness of different possibilities and scenarios prevents her from reacting inappropriately, but it also causes her to hesitate and remain indecisive.

differentiated perception prevents her from reacting inappropriately, but also results in indecision

Typical aspects according to the DMIS

In the acceptance stage of the DMIS, cultural differences are acknowledged and other people's behaviour is interpreted within their particular cultural context. Jennifer instantly begins to think about the boys' situation and tries to understand their behaviour

*ability to understand
a situation
within context*

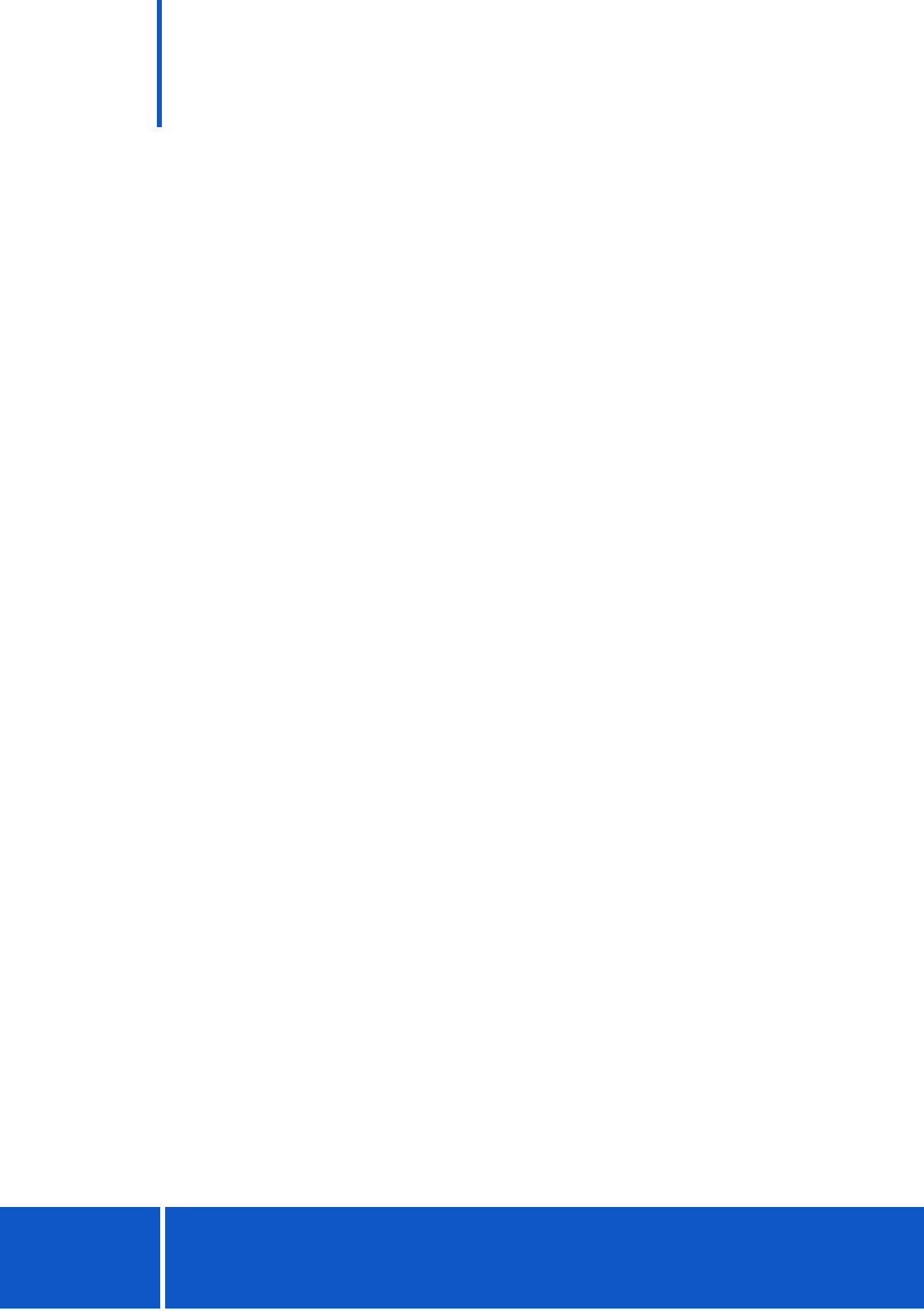
from their point of view and within their cultural context. She has gone beyond stereotypical ideas of culture and takes family particularities into consideration such as family-specific ways of practising Ramadan fasting or the visit of a relative that may have an effect on their immediate priorities. These different options demonstrate a high level of differentiation and an awareness that “their complexity” is not “my complexity”. Rather, their priorities need to be understood relative to their particular context, an approach that is typical of this stage of acceptance. Jennifer intends to understand the complexity as well as possible, in order to find the appropriate measures that may need to be taken. This high level of differentiation and respect for their behaviour causes her to be careful in her decisions, but somehow also to be indecisive and hesitant. Jennifer is curious and interested to know more. At the same time, she seems to search for more information before she can take any action.

Developing beyond ‘acceptance’

*need to find out
how to maintain
ethical commitment
in the face of relativity*

Resolution in the stage of acceptance requires value relativity: Acceptance does not mean agreement or liking. Someone at this stage may accept a different behaviour or a different value, but does not necessarily like it or agree with it. At the same time, he or she would be aware that such disagreements also exist in other cultural contexts and would not think that all people in the other culture would share his or her view. This inherent cultural relativity brings up a major issue that needs to be resolved. A person in acceptance needs to find out how to maintain ethical commitment in the face of such relativity. One response to this dilemma is a kind of paralysis, the inability to maintain any value position at all. In denial and polarisation, ethical judgements are

rooted in unquestioned truths that are organised into dichotomies such as “us and them”, “good and bad”, “right and wrong”. In minimisation, dualism is mitigated by universalism, but the truth of one’s own position remains unchallenged. In acceptance however, one’s own ethical position becomes one of several possibilities, depending on the cultural context. A person in acceptance needs to find out how to distinguish between cultural relativity and ethical relativity. This development can be supported if the complexity of cultural contrasts is further increased and particular attention is paid to the analysis of different values. This can be encouraged, for example by experiential activities such as role-plays or simulations (Bennett, 2003, p. 164; Bennett & Bennett, 2004, pp. 155-156; Bennett, 2004, pp. 69-70; 2011).



3.5 Adaptation

General description

‘Adaptation’ to cultural differences can be learnt when a person needs to think or act outside his or her own cultural context. Typically, this need occurs when casual cross-cultural contact becomes more intense, for instance when working abroad or in a multicultural team. In such a situation, the simple recognition of cultural contexts becomes insufficient for guiding behaviour. Rather, the experience of another culture yields perception and behaviour appropriate to that culture. At first, adaptation takes the form of a cognitive frame shifting. A person tries to take the perspective of another culture and seeks to organise experience accordingly. By beginning to feel in a culturally specific way, knowledge moves forward to behaviour and one begins to behave appropriately according to the cultural context (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 156; Bennett, 2004, pp. 70-71).

*adapting by behaving
appropriately to the
specific context*

For instance, people in the adaption stage may say: “To solve this dispute, I’m going to have to change my approach” or “I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways” or “I’m beginning to feel like a member of this culture” (Bennett, 2011).

A school example

Let us exemplify this stage with a teacher called “Monica”. Like Olivia (denial), Barbara (polarisation), Sandy (minimisation) and Jennifer (acceptance), Monica has to deal with the two boys asking for sports dispensation due to their Ramadan fasting practice.

Monica listens to Ibrahim and Samir and says; “Okay then, you can sit on the bench, listen to my introduction of the rules and watch the game from there.” Monica is quite satisfied with this solution and thinks: “It’s quite

normal that now and then a student cannot participate. Sometimes it's because of Ramadan, sometimes they need to go to the dentist's and miss a lesson because of that. If they had had to go to the dentist's, they wouldn't have been here at all. This way, they are still here and they can listen to my introduction of the rules."

During the sports lesson, she thinks: "If I had been in the teacher team that decided on these dates for the sports event, I would have made sure that the event wasn't taking place exactly during the month of Ramadan. On some occasion, I will take that up with my colleagues."

At noon, Monica jots down a note as a reminder that on the next occasion when she meets the boys' parents, she will tell them about the timetable clash between Ramadan and the sports event and listen to their opinion.

In the late afternoon, Monica walks into town and sees the two boys eating and drinking. "Oh", she thinks, "obviously they are using the issue of Ramadan and fasting as an excuse. Now, I should call their parents and see whether they know about this. I don't want the boys to use their additional cultural knowledge in such a way. They should learn to use it in a productive way."

Reflections on the story

Reflecting on Monica's way of responding, the following features should be highlighted: For Monica, diversity seems to be the normality: She listens to the boys and immediately integrates their request into her plan which does not seem to be a great deal to her – an absence because of an appointment at the dentist's would be the bigger deal since the oral introduction of the game rules would have been missed as well.

regarding diversity as normality

Monica not only regards diversity as a normal attribute of herself and her class, but also of the whole school. She thinks that in school event planning, important dates like those of Ramadan should be taken into consideration and she plans to bring the issue up on some future occasion.

At noon, she jots down a note to remind herself to mention the issue in the next conversation with the boys' parents. Monica intends to foster cooperation with the parents and appreciates their involvement.

When she sees Ibrahim and Samir eating and drinking in the afternoon, she assumes that they are using their “additional cultural knowledge” as an excuse to avoid the sports lesson for some reason. She suspects that even their parents might not know about this and decides to contact them. Monica considers their cultural background “additional cultural knowledge”, thus valuing it as a resource rather than a problem or deficit.

*regarding
cultural knowledge
as a resource*

Accordingly, she is concerned about Ibrahim and Samir using this resource in a manipulative way and she intends to teach them to use it productively.

Typical aspects according to the DMIS

In the adaptation stage of the DMIS, cultural differences are not only recognised as in the stage of acceptance, but the perception also enables appropriate behaviour according to the specific context. Monica is challenged to find an appropriate form of behaviour towards students who have a different cultural background and have to deal with cultural differences themselves. She adapts to the situation by regarding the cultural diversity as normality. She is aware of the fact that not all of her colleagues have the same perspective as herself and she actively brings in concerns that others might not attach as much importance to. Monica seeks a form of cooperation with the parents in which different perspectives can be taken into account in order to find a solution together. She genuinely regards cultural difference as a resource under the condition that this “additional knowledge” is being used productively.

*differentiated
perception enables
empathy according
to context*



4. Concluding remarks

As we follow the various stages of intercultural sensitivity through the DMIS and understand the underlying logic that guides the thinking, feeling and behaviour of teachers in different stages, it becomes evident that the differences which exist between teachers are remarkable.

While it is certainly true that individual teachers exhibit widely varying degrees of intercultural sensitivity, some may argue that the model is over-simplistic or at least does not address the full complexity of the topic due to its implicit normativity. It should be noted, however, that *firstly*, with the given examples, we do not claim to present the only way a teacher would react to a certain situation such as described in the ‘critical incident’. Instead, the examples are intended to serve as illustrations pointing to an underlying logic or perspective that derives from a level of complexity in the perception of cultural differences and similarities.

*implicit
normativity*

Secondly, although these different perspectives are explained as lying along a continuum of development, it does not imply a simple relation to normatively ‘good’ or ‘bad’ behaviour. As described in chapter two, the level of intercultural sensitivity is understood as a prerequisite for the development of intercultural competence and is therefore a crucial aspect for the ability to react appropriately to an intercultural situation. However, within each stage and therefore based on this precondition of a certain level in intercultural sensitivity, actions can take place in more or less constructive ways. A high level of intercultural sensitivity does not guarantee a productive way of using it, but the conditions to do so are more favourable.

Considering the remarkable differences in the thinking, feeling and behaviour of teachers at different stages of development in intercultural sensitivity, it becomes most apparent that different

*implications for
intercultural
learning*

learners (such as student teachers or in-service teachers) need to be addressed in different ways. Accordingly, teacher educators who work with student teachers or in-service teachers can increase the effectiveness of their approaches if they take these differences into account and make the choice of their methods fit the readiness of the learners. As shown in the descriptions above, the DMIS provides valuable guidelines for selecting and implementing the methods and approaches needed to adapt to the developmental needs and the readiness of the individual learners.

However, the approach of the DMIS to intercultural learning points out clearly that the development of intercultural sensitivity is not just about using appropriate methods. Rather, intercultural learning in the sense of the DMIS is about constructing more complex alternatives of how to perceive specific situations. This might imply in many cases the necessity to make alternative experiences to construct alternative perceptions of a specific situation. Intercultural learning has to be seen, therefore, as a long-term, multifaceted and challenging process – a challenging process that helps teachers to deal with the task of providing quality education for all and of preparing future generations for a just and pluralistic society.

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