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Teachers' Beliefs about Intercultural Education: Different Levels of Intercultural Sensitivity in Schooling and Teaching

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Abstract

Teachers play a key role in dealing appropriately and effectively with culturally diverse classrooms. Research on teacher competences highlights the important functions of teachers' beliefs for effective teaching. However, teachers' beliefs about intercultural education are mainly investigated with regard to general descriptions referring to prevailing deficient orientations, with regard to different typologies or with regard to their relation to classroom management, diversity-related burnout or prevailing policy discourses – but not with regard to the crucial question of what actually shapes teachers' beliefs about intercultural education and how these beliefs might be developed. Against this background, the present contribution suggests a conceptual approach to understanding teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. Thereby, it draws on intercultural theory suggesting that beliefs about intercultural education are shaped differently depending on the level of the teachers' intercultural sensitivity. Considering the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and drawing on data of 18 semi-structured interviews, including a hypothetical critical incident, the paper provides empirical evidence on how teachers' beliefs about intercultural education differ according to different levels of intercultural sensitivity. Practical implications for teacher education as well as implications for further research are discussed.

Keywords: Intercultural Education, Intercultural Sensitivity, Teacher Beliefs, Teacher Education, Cultural Diversity.

INTRODUCTION

In the current educational discourse, 'diversity' is a crucial concept that claims an appropriate consideration of differences regarding culture, gender, or aptitudes. As central actors in education, teachers play a key role in considering appropriately relevant differences – differences, which are continuously socially constructed, by others as well as by themselves (Budde, 2012).

Research on teacher competences suggests that the teachers' beliefs are crucial for performing specific

functions and tasks in teaching, e.g. for dealing effectively with diverse students (e.g. Klieme and Hartig, 2008; Reusser et al., 2011). Admittedly, the term 'belief' has still to be considered as a 'messy construct' (as identified already more than 20 years ago, see Pajares, 1992) and a clear distinction from related concepts (such as subjective theories, attitudes, conceptions or propositions) is still lacking. Nevertheless, a clear consensus has been reached that 'beliefs matter'

(Reusser et al., 2011, p. 489) and that beliefs include affectively loaded and normative elements that strongly influence teachers' perceptions, interpretations and judgements of specific situations (ibid.). Against this background, the term 'belief' is used in this contribution in the classical sense of Richardson (1996) as 'psychologically held understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true' (p. 103).

Even though the important function of beliefs is empirically well documented, teachers' beliefs have been rather scarcely investigated with regard to intercultural education. An overview on the available literature in this regard shows, *firstly*, studies that describe the belief orientations among teachers in general about diverse students and, *secondly*, studies that led to the development of typologies. Regarding the *first* kind of studies that describe the belief orientations among teachers in general, the majority of the studies reveals a clearly deficient perspective. For instance, in the German context, Marburger, Helbig, and Kienast (1997) found teachers' attitudes to follow a cultural ethnocentrism and a readiness to marginalise students and their parents with a non-German background. Similar findings come from studies by Sterzenbach and Moosmüller (2000) or Kratzmann and Pohlmann-Rother (2012). Weber (2003) has focused on teachers' perception of educationally successful female students with a Turkish background and found that teachers had a deficient orientation even towards these educationally successful students. Several studies from the USA also conclude that there is a generally deficient orientation towards students with a migrant background, for instance Cochran-Smith, David, and Fries (2004) as well as Nelson and Guerry (2013) referring to in-service teachers, or Silverman (2010) referring to pre-service teachers. For the Australian context, Buchori and Dobinson (2012) have found that early childhood educators viewed the cultural backgrounds of students from a cultural minority as 'cultural baggage' (ibid., p. 51) and as a burden and restriction to them. Apart from these repeatedly mentioned deficient orientations among teachers, there is also a study from Hong Kong in which teachers' attitudes are described to be in a state of struggle. Hue and Kennedy (2012) show that the interrogated teachers articulate struggles in four particular regards: in conceptualizing a new rationale for cultural responsiveness to diversity; in developing intercultural sensitivity; in strengthening the home-school collaboration; and in broadening ethnic minority students' aspirations for their education and careers. The authors argue that these teachers are engaged – like their students – in a cross-cultural process 'through which they learn the culture of ethnic minority students, relearn their own culture and reexamine the relevant rationale underlying cultural responsiveness' (ibid., p. 119).

Regarding the *second* kind of studies that led to the development of typologies, these approaches aim to understand teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity in a more differentiating way. Bender-Szymanski (2001), for instance, has distinguished among pre-service teachers in Germany a 'synergy oriented' approach, which is described as a 'bi-perspective situation analysis' (ibid., p. 94) from an 'ethno-oriented' approach, which is described as having a deficient view of students who appear to be culturally different and as having an expectation that culturally different students and their families should adapt to the norms of the teacher's own culture. Another suggestion for a typology comes from Akkari, Loomis, and Bauer (2011) who have examined pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity in Switzerland. They conclude that teachers either support practices of indifference towards cultural diversity or have a critical stance against the 'monocultural school system' (ibid., p. 9). Other studies define more than two kinds of beliefs and suggest several types of teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity. For instance, based on interviews with primary school teachers in Switzerland, Edelmann (2006) developed a typology with six different ways of thinking about cultural heterogeneity, considering the meaning teachers attach to cultural heterogeneity, how they look at language diversity and how their orientations are embedded in the school teams. Another typology comes from Lanfranchi (2008) who has asked about pre-school and first grade school teachers' strategies in dealing with cultural differences in Switzerland. He suggests an approximation to a typology with five types: a first one focusing on the adaption to predefined monocultural school routines; a second one with a deficient orientation; a third with biological interpretations of culture; a fourth with a resource oriented perspective on immigrant children; and a fifth that has a differentiated perspective on different kinds of social differences. Yet another typology has been suggested by Stier, Tryggvason, Sandström, and Sandberg (2012) who have explored pre-school teachers' understanding of and practical approaches to ethnic and cultural diversity in Sweden. They defined four different approaches which are seen as increasingly productive in the order mentioned: an 'instrumental,' a 'co-productive,' a 'facilitative proactive,' and an 'agitative proactive' approach.

Whereas the majority of the empirical literature covers studies dealing with, firstly, mainly deficient belief orientations among teachers or, secondly, typologies of teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity, some few studies refer to the relation between teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity and their classroom management (Makarova and Herzog, 2013), to teachers' beliefs as an expression of a 'collective intercultural competence' of teacher teams (Over, 2012), to the coherence or incoherence between teachers' beliefs and the prevailing

policy discourse (in Spain: Bereményi, 2011; in Greece: Govaris and Kodakos, 2003; in Israel: Mizrachi, 2012) or to the relation between teachers' beliefs and diversity-related burnout and stress (Tatar and Horenczyk, 2003).

However, hardly any evidence addresses the question of what shapes teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. A few studies deal with the question of how teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity are related to socio-cultural categories such as ethnicity, gender or class. Beady and Hansell (1981) show that 'black teachers expected their black students to be more successful in college than white teachers' (*ibid.*, p. 199). Quijoch and Rios (2000) published a review on the literature on minority group teachers – mainly from the USA – and concluded in their synthesis that 'many minority group teachers, in comparison with their European-American counterparts, are more likely to bring a critical, social justice orientation and consciousness that stems from their real, lived experiences with inequality' (*ibid.*, p. 522). And Ford and Quinn (2010) revealed differences related to gender. Their study suggests that females show a larger level of agreement in questions on multicultural engagement such as on the need for multicultural instructional practice or the need for teachers' multicultural awareness. Differences also appeared between white and non-white students in that non-white students were found to be able to understand cultural differences and to have a desire for social justice.

However, these suggested relations with socio-cultural categories do not really address the question of what shapes teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. This question seems to be neglected to a great extent in the research literature, although it would be of crucial importance for teacher education. If teacher education aims at preparing and supporting teachers for dealing effectively with culturally diverse settings, it has to be understood how teachers conceptualise key facets of intercultural education and how these conceptualisations might be influenced. In light of this, the present contribution suggests the value of a conceptual approach to understanding teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. Thereby, it draws on intercultural theory suggesting that beliefs about intercultural education are shaped differently depending on the level of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986, 2011). This level of intercultural sensitivity expresses the level of complexity in the perception of cultural differences and similarities.

This is a constructivist approach applied to the field of interculturalism, whereby perceptions may have different levels of sophistication and complexity. The 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.' This means that a higher intercultural

sensitivity is reflected in a more differentiated and more sophisticated way of perceiving specific constellations and situations regarding cultural differences and commonalities. An individual's development of intercultural sensitivity can be seen as a development process for which an elaborated model has been provided by Bennett (1986, 2011). His 'Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity' (DMIS) conceptualises the development of intercultural sensitivity in different stages. The DMIS defines five distinct kinds of experience that spread across the continuum from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative worldview. The most ethnocentric stage is called 'denial' of cultural difference (expressing a worldview that does not notice other cultures or constructs them in very vague ways as 'foreigners' or 'immigrants') and is followed by 'polarisation' (expressing a worldview that organises and polarises the perceptions in terms of 'us' and 'them'; in earlier publications, this stage was called 'defense/reversal'). The middle of the continuum is named 'minimisation' of cultural difference (expressing a worldview that avoids cultural difference by assuming 'deep down, we are all the same'). This 'minimisation' stage is conceived as a transitional stage leading to the two more ethnorelative orientations of 'acceptance' (expressing a worldview that perceives one's own culture as just one of many other equally complex worldviews) and 'adaptation' (expressing a worldview that allows for flexible frame shifting in order to organise one's own experience through the perspective of another culture).

The level of intercultural sensitivity – including the respective beliefs according to such a level – can be seen as a crucial precondition for acting with intercultural competence and 'creates the potential for increased intercultural competence' (Bennett, 2004, p. 73). The existing literature, however, does not portray a conception of how teachers' beliefs change or differ depending on the level of intercultural sensitivity, i.e. depending on the complexity of how individuals perceive schooling and teaching. Regarding intercultural sensitivity and focusing on levels of perception, decisive differences between ethnocentric and ethnorelative worldviews have to be expected. In other words, teacher students, teachers and teacher educators will most probably have different beliefs about cultural differences and similarities and therefore also about intercultural education if they are in an ethnocentric stage of development or if they have developed an ethnorelative perspective.

With this in mind, the present contribution addresses the question of how teachers' beliefs regarding intercultural education differ according to different levels of intercultural sensitivity. With this approach, a translation of the generic DMIS to the specific context of schooling and teaching is proposed: How are different levels of intercultural sensitivity reflected in perceiving

specific situations in school? What are prototypical operationalizations of different levels of intercultural sensitivity in teaching? By answering these questions on an empirical basis, this contribution provides the fundamentals for moving 'intercultural education' from normatively imbued top-down training to a form of needs-based support for teachers. In order to answer these questions, the following methodology was adopted.

METHOD

The methodology for the presented research is structured according to the concept of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), following mainly qualitative approaches. Correspondingly, the data was collected by 'theoretical sampling' (Corbin, 2003) striving for a variety of teachers that have different amounts of experience in dealing with cultural heterogeneity and different levels of intercultural sensitivity. Within this framework, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Eight of them were conducted in Switzerland with elementary school teachers – ISCED-level 1 – from the cantons of Zug, Uri, Schwyz and Zurich, and ten of them in Serbia with elementary school teachers – ISCED-level 1 – for English language in the regions of Belgrade, Ub, Raska and Vranje.

The semi-structured interviews included questions on the teachers' notion of cultural heterogeneity, on their experiences with cultural differences and similarities in school and on aims of intercultural education. In a second part of the interview, a hypothetical 'critical incident' was presented to the respondents (for an overview on the characteristics of a 'critical incident', see Hiller, 2009). For this purpose, a short story was invented that should put the respondents into an (imagined) dilemma situation in which cultural differences can be perceived and would need to be dealt with. Dealing with the dilemma and weighing up different options to react in the role of a teacher reveals the teachers' beliefs about cultural differences. Therefore, the teachers were given the description of a situation such as a teacher may expect to encounter during his or her everyday life at school and they were asked to imagine being part of this particular situation in the role of a teacher. The 'critical incident' contains two parts:

1. *You are in a sports lesson with your fifth grade class. The lesson is about to begin. You have planned to play the team game of 'netball'. It is important that all students know the game and its rules, because it will be played with other classes at the 'school sports day' that will take place in a week's time. Two boys of this class*

have not put on their sports clothes. They come to you to tell you that they cannot take part in the sports activities. They are from a Muslim family and they explain that it is Ramadan, they have not drunk or eaten all day and they are not able to do any sports.

2. *After school, at around four pm, you walk through town and you see one of the two Muslim boys. He is together with some school friends. You see him drinking a coke and eating a kebab.*

For each of the two parts, the respondents were asked about how they perceive the situation, how they would (hope to) react, and about their reason for such an intervention. In addition to the interviews, the respondents completed the questionnaire of the 'Intercultural Development Inventory' (IDI; Hammer, 2009). With this validated and widely recognised assessment tool, which is based on the DMIS, the respondents' level of intercultural sensitivity was assessed. IDI scores range from 55 points (at the beginning of denial) to 145 points (at the end of adaptation), whereas 100 points represents the middle of the continuum in minimization.

The comprehensive data from the interviews was analysed according to the methodology of content analysis by Mayring (2010). By using the software Maxqda, key elements in each teacher's beliefs were identified. Subsequently, the results from the IDI were used to relate different teachers' beliefs to different levels of intercultural sensitivity and to identify the core patterns of the teachers' beliefs on different levels of intercultural sensitivity. Firstly, these core patterns were identified for the Serbian and the Swiss sample separately and secondly they were identified regarding the whole sample from both country contexts. This procedure led to a sharpening of the results as well as to insight into what scope the results have. In this contribution, those core patterns are reported that arose in both contexts similarly or at least analogously.

Even though the strategy of theoretical sampling was followed, no teachers were found to have high IDI scores, i.e. teachers in the stages of 'acceptance' or 'adaptation'. Therefore, the sample comprises 18 interviewed teachers within the following stages: Two teachers were identified by the IDI in the stage of 'denial' (with IDI scores of 64 and 68), nine teachers in the stage of 'polarisation' (with IDI scores between 74 and 85) and seven in the stage of 'minimisation' (with IDI scores between 86 and 109). The following results depict the analyses of the respective 18 interviews. Background information about these teachers is introduced when their narratives are presented in order to illustrate the results. Note that names have been changed for reasons of privacy.

RESULTS

Teachers at the 'denial' stage of intercultural sensitivity

Hearing about the first part of the 'critical incident' and the two boys' request for sports dispensation due to their Ramadan fasting practice, the two respondents in the 'denial' stage express that they rather dislike the request but they would grant it. Mrs Gretler, a 27 year old teacher from Switzerland with 5 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 68, states that Ramadan fasting practice was unknown to her. She would grant their dispensation for the moment but contact the parents about precise information on 'when exactly this is, how long it goes on and [...] all the things, that they cannot do.' Mrs Ilic, a 53 year old teacher from Serbia with 23 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 64, stresses that she was responsible for the students' health during her lessons and that she would be held accountable in case of an accident. For this reason, she says, 'you cannot force them to participate, if they have not drunk or eaten all day long'.

At the same time, both respondents are concerned about the approaching sports event and its organisation. They feel dissatisfied that they had not been informed beforehand as this would have allowed them to prepare themselves for the situation such as by finding substitutes for the two boys in the sports team. They are also concerned about the class community. The respondents would prefer the boys' participation in the sports event due to its importance for the community. Mrs Gretler expresses her hope that such a situation does 'not last eternally', otherwise she would be 'against it' as, from her point of view, it may be hindering the two boys' participation in the class community. Mrs Ilic holds that the two boys should respect their classmates for whom 'this day is also important'. Therefore, the day should be just as important to the two boys who are 'a part of that community'.

Hearing about the second part of the 'critical incident' in which one of the boys is seen eating and drinking in town, both respondents seem irritated. Mrs Gretler is ambivalent about whether or not she would address the boy about her observation, as she argues, it is actually the boy's own business. She adds that the boy may not have seen her at all so that there was no need to address him. Mrs Ilic says that she would address the boy and tell him – with an ironic undertone – that if he can be so inconsistent about his religious behaviour he may also consider to apply 'the same criteria' upon his school obligations.

In the answers of Mrs Gretler and Mrs Ilic, some main tendencies can be found: The two respondents are mainly concerned about practical and organisational

aspects of the situation. They regard the situation as an interruption of the school routine and intend to reinstall this routine by reorganising and rearranging with practical or organisational measures. Firstly, the routine is seen to be affected by the boys' request for dispensation from the sports lesson. Although the request for dispensation is not appreciated, it is granted for practical reasons such as the responsibility of the teacher in case of an accident. Secondly, the routine is seen to be potentially affected if the two boys cannot participate in the sports event itself. The respondents stress the need to be informed by the parents for such a case, so that the event organisation can be arranged accordingly. Thirdly, the routine is seen to be potentially affected regarding the boys' participation in the class community. The (imagined) encounter in the afternoon is irritating for the two respondents, but is not seen as affecting the routine and would therefore not necessarily be addressed.

Therefore, the respondents in the 'denial' stage in their development of intercultural sensitivity are mainly preoccupied with practical and organisational concerns. They perceive the situation as an interruption of the school routine in terms of a practical problem that needs to be resolved. The cultural context is hardly referred to or if so, only in a very broad sense. Mrs Gretler, for instance, is of the opinion that 'one can follow those rituals of one's religion or culture', but 'within reason', which means to her, as long as it does not affect the school routine.

Teachers at the 'polarisation' stage of intercultural sensitivity

Asked about their reaction to the two boys' request for sports dispensation because of Ramadan, the nine respondents in the 'polarisation' stage weigh up whether or not they should agree with such a request as they expect to cause irritation or a conflict with the boys' parents. Within the sample, two different strategies in dealing with this potential irritation or conflict appear:

One common strategy was for respondents to decide that they would address the issue upfront: Mrs Girsberger, for instance, a 49-year-old teacher from Switzerland with 5 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 80, would take the two boys aside and tell them in a private conversation that they did not need to follow these religious rules as it was not an obligation for children to fast like adults and that they 'should at least drink something', that 'certainly no one would be against that' and that they can still 'have a good conscience'. Besides, she would tell them, that fasting at this age was not good for their health. Mrs Jelic, a 31 year-old teacher from Serbia with 6 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 85, would not make the boys participate since she believes that this situation could not be resolved

at once. She would talk to the children later and persuade them to participate, arguing that their participation in the sports event was more important than respecting 'some religious custom of theirs'. Mrs Kaufmann, a 31-year old teacher from Switzerland with 5 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 74, would contact the parents and ask them whether it would be possible to let the children 'eat and drink at least a little bit' so that they can participate in the group activities. In any case she would discuss the situation within the class to mitigate any potential exclusion or conflict.

The second strategy for some respondents was to decide that they would prefer to avoid the potential irritation or conflict. Mr Mueller, for example, a 31-year-old teacher from Switzerland with 5 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 77, would not agree with the boys' request, but would permit the boys to just watch the game without commenting on their reasoning. He would not talk about it to the boys or the other class members and neither to the parents. He believes that 'that is holy to them' and, from his point of view, it would inevitably lead to a situation of conflict if it was made the subject of discussion. Mrs Markovic, a 40-year-old teacher from Serbia with 14 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 75, emphasises that she does not see this situation as a provocation. She stresses that she holds strongly to her own religion and she herself would not like to be 'provoked or attacked in that domain by anybody'. She would let the two boys participate on the school sports day as viewers because that way she would show her respect for their religion, but also because 'getting into all that can be unpleasant and create bigger problems'.

The first as well as the second strategy follow the underlying logic of 'them' or 'that kind of people' (Mrs Jelic) or 'those people' (Mr Mueller) not behaving like 'us', which potentially leads to irritation, problems or conflict. In all cases, the root cause of this potential problem is seen to be with the boys' parents and their culture and not with the boys themselves. Mrs Jelic, for instance, criticises the parents for prioritising religion over school obligations and considers that 'the parents should be taught, not the kids'. Mr Mueller is concerned about 'those people' coming to Switzerland and not adapting: 'Man, we are in Switzerland here and not over there, aren't we [...] I just find that these people that come to Switzerland, they should really adapt a little.' Additionally, most respondents stress that they regard the situation as an 'embarrassing exposure of the children' (e.g. Mr Mueller). From their point of view, the parents underestimate how much their children dislike it or 'feel ashamed' (e.g. Mrs Kaufmann) when they have to follow such rules and how easily this leads to exclusion. Therefore, they intend to help the children adapt to 'us' despite the disadvantage they are perceived to have because of their parents' group belonging or culture.

In line with this logic, the second part of the 'critical incident' is perceived as not surprising, and by some also as expected or even desired. All respondents feel affirmed in their assumption that it was not important to the boys to follow the religious rules, but rather to be and behave like their peers: 'The peer group was stronger than their home' (Mrs Jelic).

The following main tendencies can be found: The respondents perceive the situation as potentially causing irritation or conflict. The boys' behaviour is seen to be 'not like us' or 'not normal'. Among the respondents, there are two different ways of dealing with the situation. Firstly, there is the way of addressing the perceived problem upfront and teaching the boys to act like a majority group member intending to include them into the majority group. Secondly, there is the way of avoiding a potential offense or conflict, therefore getting involved as little as possible and letting 'them' follow 'their rules'. In both cases the respondents distinguish between the two boys and their parents. While the parents are seen to be the cause of the problem, the boys are seen to dislike the situation, preferring to behave and be like their peers. The root cause of the problem is seen to lie with the boys' parents and their culture, not with the boys themselves.

Therefore, the respondents in the 'polarisation' stage in their development of intercultural sensitivity are mainly preoccupied with the situation as potentially causing irritation or conflict, as from the respondents' perspective, it is 'them' who do not behave like 'us', while the behaviour of one's own group is seen to be favourable. The respondents interpret the behaviour of the two boys as typical for certain 'other' groups. As the typical behaviour is allocated to groups, the respondents also expect that the described situation potentially causes irritations between group members.

Teachers at the 'minimisation' stage of intercultural sensitivity

Thinking about the first part of the 'critical incident' and the two boys' request for sports dispensation due to their Ramadan fasting practice, the seven respondents in 'minimisation' stage decide that they would grant the two boys' request. At the same time they express their concerns about incompatibilities with the school aims or guidelines. Mrs Caflisch, for instance, a 49-year-old teacher from Switzerland with 24 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 90, expresses her concerns about their ability to learn and concentrate 'as it is actually supposed to be', if they abstain from eating and drinking. She stresses that the one thing all school children and their parents have in common is the aspiration for learning achievements and educational success. While she highlights this commonality, she states that cultural differences – and particularly national origin – are easily overemphasised and should not be

paid so much attention to. Focusing on the common interest of educational success, she considers contacting the boys' parents to discuss possibilities so that the boys can maintain their learning despite their religious obligations. Mrs Maric, a 30-year-old teacher from Serbia with 4 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 92, is also concerned about incompatibilities with school regulations. She says that the boys' request causes a dilemma to her: 'Religious feelings are deeply emerged in our personal identity and no matter what the school rules are, I think that we cannot ignore them.' She therefore contemplates how religious practice can become part of the school regulations which again causes a dilemma, the dilemma of its potentially inadequate implications for children of other or no religion. Mrs Simic, a 50-year-old teacher from Serbia with 24 years of teaching experience and an IDI score of 109, suggests that such inconsistencies should be solved on a general level by systematically integrating minority children's rights into the general school regulations. Focusing on the incompatibilities with the school aims or guidelines, most respondents mention that they would confer with other members of the school staff in order to find an adequate solution for the two boys.

The second part of the 'critical incident' is perceived as an irritation or even disappointment. Mrs Cafilisch imagines that she would say to the boys: 'Well, I have taken you seriously and I have accepted that you cannot do sports because of your religion and now I see you eating and drinking. I want an explanation for that.' Mrs Maric says that she would not punish the boys but her attitude would change: 'Then I would consider his religious feelings to be insincere and I would insist that they should work next time'.

The following main tendencies can be found: The respondents' perceive the situation as something that interferes with the school aims and regulations. They are mainly concerned about finding an appropriate solution on a general level, for instance by stressing the common interest of learning achievements, which should not be affected by religious obligations (Mrs Cafilisch) or by contemplating adjusting the school regulations and integrating minority rights (Mrs Maric). Being concerned with school aims and regulations, they would seek reassurance by conferring with other school representatives. The respondents articulate a readiness to make an effort to find a solution, which may explain their disappointment in the second part of the incident. The data indicates that it was their sincere intention to demonstrate their tolerance by allowing an exception to the principle or guideline, an effort that they would have expected to be met with respect from the boys' side as well. Finding that the boys seem not to be sincere about their request causes them to feel disappointed.

Therefore, the respondents in the 'minimisation' stage

in their development of intercultural sensitivity have a main tendency to deal with the situation by stressing a general principle that applies to everyone at their school regardless of the cultural background or individual uniqueness. In this context, the 'critical incident' is perceived as something that potentially interferes with the main principle or school rules so that an exception from the rule needs to be discussed.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This contribution aimed to provide empirical answers to the question of how teachers' beliefs regarding intercultural education differ according to different levels of intercultural sensitivity. In doing so, it proposes a translation of the generic DMIS to the specific context of schooling and teaching. Within the given sample the range of intercultural sensitivity did not cover all stages of the DMIS. Nonetheless, the results show that teachers with different levels of intercultural sensitivity chose very different approaches in addressing the imagined situation of the introduced 'critical incident'. Different patterns appear in their described perception as well as in their intended behaviour. These different patterns shall now be reviewed within the framework of the DMIS.

Regarding the '*denial*' stage, the DMIS assumes that in this early ethnocentric stage, 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 (Bennett, 2004, p. 63). The findings of this contribution show that the teachers in the stage of 'denial' meet the situation of the 'critical incident' with hardly any reference to the cultural context. Their interest in the cultural context of the two boys is limited to the information they need to have in order to maintain or reinstall the routine. The limited interest becomes particularly apparent with the second part of the 'critical incident' and the respondents' reaction to the encounter in the afternoon. One of the respondents, for instance, considers not to have been seen by the boys and therefore not having to address something that she – according to DMIS – may not be able to perceive and may therefore not feel comfortable with or may even prefer to avoid.

Regarding the '*polarisation*' stage, the DMIS assumes that people in this stage 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

(Hammer, 2009). While people in the stage of polarisation recognise cultural differences better than people in the stage of denial, they typically feel a need to protect their own culture. As a result, people in the stage of 'polarisation' 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 protecting one's own culture by declaring it superior than the other (Bennett, 1986, pp.37-38). The findings of this contribution show that the teachers in the stage of 'polarisation' interpret the 'critical incident' by applying a template of 'us' and 'them'. Additionally, they regard the situation to be caused by the parents' culture and their group belonging as Muslims. Accordingly, the boys are seen to be in a difficult situation in that they are obliged to follow the rules of their parents' group and at the same time desiring to participate in group activities of the school's culture and their peer group. For these teachers it seems obvious that the boys prefer to be and behave like their peers, which may be due to the fact that the teachers perceive their own culture as the superior one. Consequently, the teachers intend to support these boys to feel more integrated into the majority group.

Regarding the '*minimisation*' stage, the DMIS conceives this stage as transitional 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. Consequently, the tolerance towards other cultures is often overestimated (Bennett, 1986, p. 42; 2004, pp. 66-67). The transition to an ethnorelative perspective requires an awareness of one's own culture. 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. With an ethnorelative perspective, people interpret the behaviour of other people within their particular cultural context. Cultural differences are both acknowledged and respected and the existence of differences is accepted as a human condition (Bennett, 1986, p. 47; 2004, p. 68).

The findings of this contribution show that most respondents in the stage of 'minimisation' react to the 'critical incident' by referring to a commonality such as the striving for educational success or the school guide lines and rules. These commonalities can be seen as an

attempt to deal with cultural differences by emphasising a common ground. Approval of this common ground is sought from other school representatives. This might be seen as a need to have official acknowledgement of a general principle which – according to the DMIS – may in turn even be seen as culturally unspecific in the sense that it is almost universally applicable, regardless of cultural context. The DMIS points to the fact that such a principle is ethnocentrically generated and the tolerance of such an approach is generally overestimated. This explains the teachers' disappointment in the second part of the incident since they had regarded themselves as tolerant – putting such an effort into finding an appropriate exception for the two boys – but did not receive the expected appreciation for their assumed tolerance from the boys' side.

The review of the different patterns within the framework of the DMIS reveals a high congruence of the empirically detected beliefs about intercultural education on the one hand with the theoretical assumptions regarding the development of intercultural sensitivity on the other. This congruence supports the assumption that teachers' beliefs about intercultural education differ according to different levels of intercultural sensitivity and – conversely speaking – that a development of intercultural sensitivity might lead to a change in one's beliefs about intercultural education. This finding may be seen as an important contribution to the literature on intercultural education in that it opens the floor for working on teachers' beliefs on the basis of need-based support instead of a normative approach: 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 learners (such as pre-service or in-service teachers) need to be addressed in different ways. The developmental needs that enable a teacher to develop his or her intercultural sensitivity differ between the different stages of the DMIS. Accordingly, teacher educators who work with 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.

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 seen as a development of more sophisticated worldviews, viz. a development of more complex categories for the perception of the world. In this sense, intercultural learning implies an increasing awareness of cultural differences and similarities and a growing sensitivity of the cultural imprints of one's own perceptions. Intercultural learning has to be seen, therefore, as a long-term, multifaceted and challenging process.

Even though the approach of this study proved to be

highly beneficial to understanding a possible underlying logic of teachers' beliefs, some limitations have to be discussed. *Firstly*, it might be argued that the DMIS is over-simplistic in its linear conception or at least does not address the full complexity of the topic due to its implicit normativity (see for further critiques of the DMIS e.g. Garrett-Rucks, 2014; Matsumoto and Hwang, 2013). It should be noted, however, that even though these different patterns are explained as lying along a continuum of development, it does not imply a simple relation to normatively 'good' or 'bad' behaviour. The level of intercultural sensitivity is rather 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 with different levels of 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.

Secondly, as a methodological limitation, the sample did not cover all stages of the DMIS, and even in the represented stages, the distribution of the sample was fairly uneven. With only two cases in the 'denial' stage, it might be argued that the empirical basis is too weak to allow generalizable findings. However, this contribution did not aim to describe representative distributions of teachers' beliefs in different stages of the DMIS. It rather aimed to identify and understand the underlying logic of teachers' beliefs about intercultural education and, in doing so, to detect possible means to modify these beliefs. With the adopted qualitative approach, focusing strongly on the inherent logic of the single cases, it was indeed possible to identify conceptual relations between the analysed cases on the one hand and the theoretical assumptions of the DMIS on the other.

Thirdly, analysing data from different contexts (in this paper: data from Swiss and from Serbian teachers) always risks comparing different units of analysis because given issues or situations might have different meanings in different contexts and, thus, might not be comparable. This is indeed a delicate matter which requires challenging methodological considerations. However, this contribution aimed to identify a general underlying logic in different cases and, therefore, tried to abstract from the concrete and specific characteristics of the individual cases. This does not mean that contextual factors were not taken into account during the analyses, but that this contribution focuses on the general underlying logics with regard to specific levels of intercultural sensitivity. Therefore, the data was analysed in the two country contexts separately at first and only in a second step brought together. This procedure led to a

sharpening of the findings and to a confirmation of the analyses done in the two country contexts. The fact that the reported patterns were found in both contexts can indeed be read as a validation of the findings. (This argument does not deny the existence of differences between the two country contexts, but they were not detected on the level of the reported core patterns. The analyses of the differences and of their possible reasons are expressions of another analytical interest and are left, therefore, for another contribution.)

This argument leads to desiderata for future research. It seems obvious that other factors than only the specific level of intercultural sensitivity shape and influence teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. But, if teacher education strives for modifying individual teachers' beliefs in a productive manner, it relies on further knowledge about the genesis and development of these beliefs. Further research should, therefore, investigate means to modify prevailing beliefs. For instance, it is still an open question whether a development of intercultural sensitivity leads, in the individual cases, to modified beliefs about intercultural education. The presented empirical evidence represents, in this sense, a cross-sectional approach, whereas individual developments could only be shown with longitudinal approaches. Furthermore, a broader empirical basis – both to cover all stages of the DMIS and to consider other actors such as pre-service teachers – could contribute to an even better understanding of the structural relation between teachers' beliefs about intercultural education on the one hand and the development of intercultural sensitivity on the other. Last but not least, the findings raise the question of how to address different developmental needs within the (more or less constrained) structures of formalised teacher education – a challenging question to be addressed in further contributions.

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