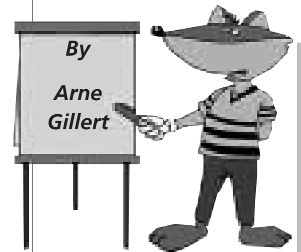
2. Concepts of intercultural learning



2.1 Introduction

Writing about concepts of intercultural learning is an intercultural experience in itself. The different ideas that are behind one and the same term, "intercultural learning", reveal a lot about the history of the persons who developed them.

Choosing among the different ideas and commenting on them is probably again more revealing about the history and preferences of the author(s), than about intercultural learning in itself.

Consequently, this chapter does not pretend to offer any kind of "truth" about intercultural learning, but it is rather an attempt to provide a – necessarily biased – overview of some different theories and concepts that have been connected to intercultural learning.

As is true with many theories, including the ones introduced here, they use some fancy words and phrases. We have deliberately chosen to include theories using these phrases – not to scare you away, but to equip you with these terms.

People use them often when talking about intercultural learning. These theories are at the roots of what you might have been doing practically for quite some time.

The term "intercultural learning" can be understood on different levels. On a more literal level, intercultural learning refers to an individual process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes, or behaviour that is connected with the interaction of different cultures.

Very often, however, intercultural learning is seen in a larger context to denote a concept of how people with different backgrounds can live together peacefully, and the process that is needed to build such a society.

"Learning" in this context is consequently understood less on a purely individual level, but emphasises the open ended character of this process towards an "intercultural" society.

The term "intercultural learning" will be explored according to its various components and interpretations here.

2.2 Looking at learning

What is "learning"?

Learning is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's of Current English dictionary as "gaining knowledge of or skill in, by study, practice or being taught". Starting from this very general definition, various discussions can be identified.

Learning on different levels

Learning takes place on three different, interrelated levels: on a cognitive, an emotional, and a behavioural level.

Cognitive learning is the acquirement of knowledge or beliefs: knowing that 3 plus 3 is 6, that the earth is conceived of having the shape of a ball, or that there are currently 41 member states of the Council of Europe.

Emotional learning is more difficult as a concept to grasp. Perhaps you can look back and remember how you have learned to express your feelings, and how these feelings have changed through time. What has made you afraid twenty years ago might not make you afraid any more, persons you did not like in the first place might now be your best friends, etc.

Behavioural learning is what is visible of learning: Being able to hammer a nail straight into a piece of wood, to write with a pen, to eat with chopsticks, or to welcome somebody in the "right" way.

Real learning involves all three levels, the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. If you want to learn how to eat with chopsticks, you need to know how you have to hold them and you need to learn the right movements. But both will not have a lasting effect if you do not learn to like eating with them – or at least see an advantage in so doing.

Learning as an (un)structured process
Learning can happen both by accident and as a result of a planned process. If we look back, we realize that we have learned many things from experiences that we did not engage in order to learn. On the other hand, most of the time learning involves some kind of structured,

or at least intentional, process. We will not learn from accidental experience if we do not intentionally reflect upon it.
Both non-formal and formal education systems use structured processes to facilitate learning. The moment you have picked up this T-kit to think about how best to look at intercultural learning in a group-environment, you most probably are concerned with learning as a structured, and not purely accidental, process. Intercultural learning experiences through training courses, seminars, group meetings, workshops, exchanges, etc. are examples of structured intercultural learning processes.

Roles in Learning
Learning is also about roles. As most children share the school as an early structured learning experience, the role-pair at hand is the one of teacher-student. For most people involved in non-formal education, however, it is obvious that learning can very effectively be set-up as a two-way process, where people learn from each other by interacting. In fact, we do learn constantly, but many people do not conceive of themselves as learners and, at times unconsciously, prefer the role of a teacher. Creating the openness for mutual learning is one of the challenges everyone involved in non-formal education faces when starting to work with a new group of people – and, as a personal remark, I sometimes wish those involved in formal education would take up that challenge in the classroom as well.

Methods of Learning
If we think of learning as a structured process it makes sense to look at the methods of learning in this process. Researchers have proven several times that people learn most powerfully through their own experience – in situations that involved cognition, emotion, and action. If we want to provide space for learning, we should offer methods that allow for experience and reflection on all of these three levels. Have a look further in this T-Kit for suggested methods and methodologies for intercultural learning.

2.3 What is culture? And what, then, is intercultural?

The second term we look at incorporated into “intercultural learning” is *culture.* All ideas about intercultural learning build on an implicit or explicit idea about culture. They all have in common that they perceive culture as something human-made. Culture has been referred to as the “software” which people use in daily life; it is commonly described as being about basic assumptions, values and norms that people hold. There are many theoretical and practical arguments and discussions about concepts of culture.

Is culture necessarily linked to a group of people, or does “individual culture” exist?
What are elements of culture?
Can one establish a “cultural map” of the world?
Do cultures change? Why and how?
How strong is the link between culture and actual behaviour of individuals and groups?
Can one have several cultural backgrounds – and what does that imply?
How flexible is culture, how open for individual interpretation?

Very often, looking at culture implies looking at the interaction of cultures. Many authors have stated that, if it were not for the existence of more than one culture, we would not think about culture at all. The apparent differences of how humans can think, feel and act are what make us aware of culture. Culture, therefore, cannot be thought of simply as “culture”, it has to be thought of as “cultures”. Consequently, it makes sense to advance in this chapter from ideas that are mainly focused on culture in itself to ideas that focus more on the interaction of cultures, on intercultural experiences.

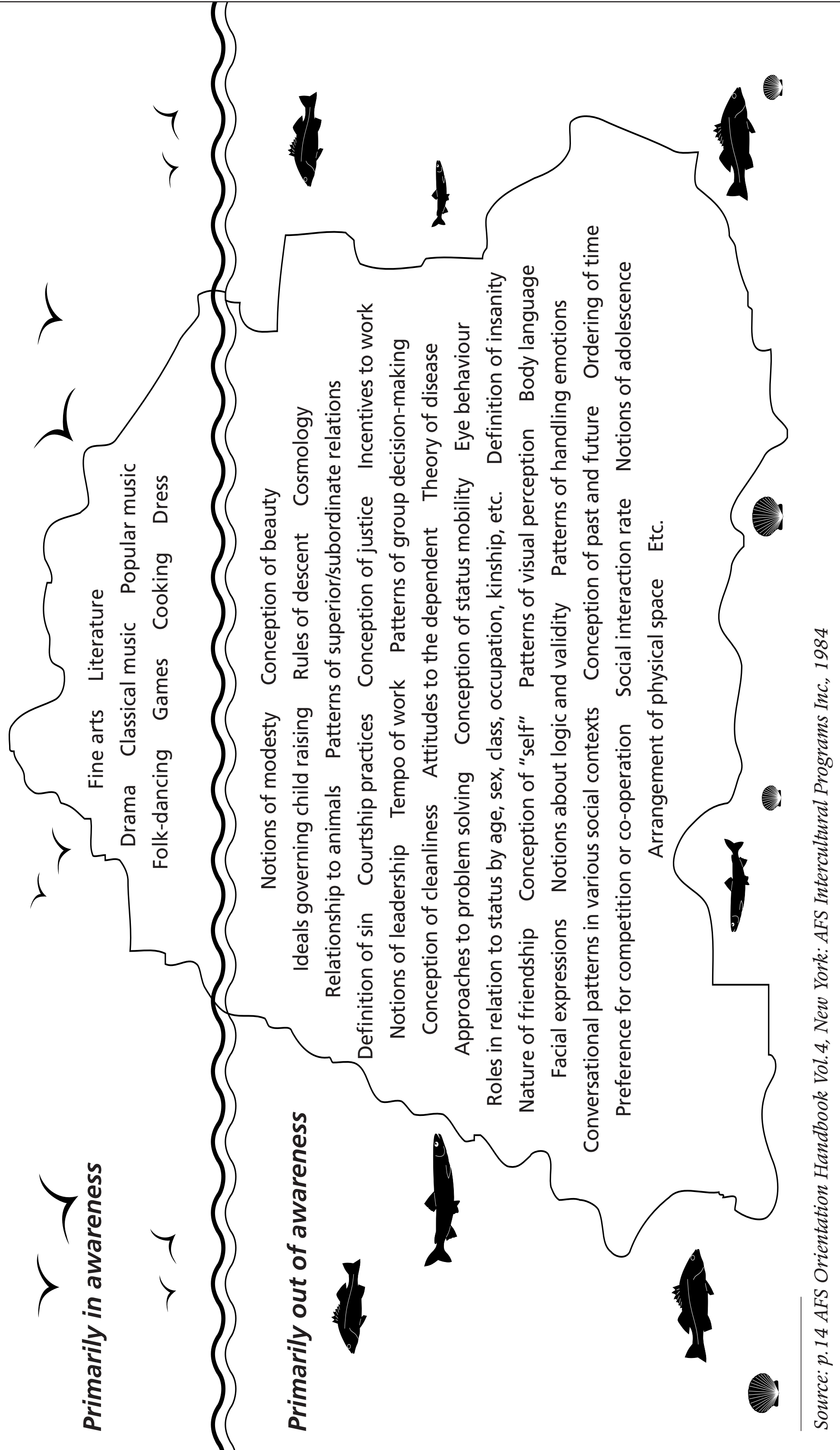
Some terms are at times used to replace “intercultural”, such as “cross-cultural” or “multicultural”. For some authors, these terms are identical, some others connect largely different meanings to these words. These differences will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.4 Looking at culture

2.4.1 The Iceberg Model of Culture

One of the most well-known models of culture is the iceberg. Its main focus is on the elements that make up culture, and on the fact, that some of these elements are very visible, whereas others are hard to discover.

Fig. 1: The iceberg concept of culture



Source: p.14 AFS Orientation Handbook Vol.4, New York: AFS Intercultural Programs Inc., 1984

The idea behind this model is that culture can be pictured as an iceberg: only a very small portion of the iceberg can be seen above the water line. This top of the iceberg is supported by the much larger part of the iceberg, underneath the water line and therefore invisible. Nonetheless, this lower part of the iceberg is the powerful foundation.

Also in culture, there are some visible parts: architecture, art, cooking, music, language, just to name a few. But the powerful foundations of culture are more difficult to spot: the history of the group of people that hold the culture, their norms, values, basic assumptions about space, nature, time, etc.
The iceberg model implies that the visible parts of culture are just expressions of its invisible parts. It also points out, how difficult it is at times to understand people with different cultural backgrounds – because we may spot the visible parts of "their iceberg", but we cannot immediately see what are the foundations that these parts rest upon.

On the other hand, the iceberg model leaves a number of the questions raised above unanswered. Most of the time, it is used as a starting point for a more in-depth look at culture, a first visualisation of why sometimes it is so difficult to understand and "see" culture.

Relevance for youth work

The iceberg model focuses our attention on the hidden aspects of culture. It is a reminder that in intercultural encounters, similarities we might find at first sight turn out to be based on completely different assumptions about reality. Among young people, cultural differences may sometimes not be so obvious to perceive: across borders young people like jeans, listen to pop music and need to access their e-mails. Learning interculturally then means to become firstly aware of the lower part of one's own iceberg, and to be able to talk about it with others in order to understand each other better and find common grounds.

2.4.2 Geert Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions

Geert Hofstede's idea about culture is based on one of the largest empirical studies ever done on cultural differences. In the 1970s, he was asked by IBM (already then a very international company) to advise them on the fact that in spite of all attempts by IBM to establish worldwide common procedures and standards, there were still vast differences in the way the plants in e.g. Brazil and Japan were running.
Hofstede researched the differences in how IBM was running. In several stages, including in-depth interviews and questionnaires sent out to all employees of IBM worldwide, he tried to put his finger on the differences that existed in the various plants. Since the educational background of IBM's employees was roughly the same everywhere, and since the structure of the organisation, the rules and the procedures were the same, he concluded that any difference found between the different locations had to be based on the culture of the employees in a particular plant and by that, largely on the culture of the host country. Hofstede describes culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of the human group from one another".

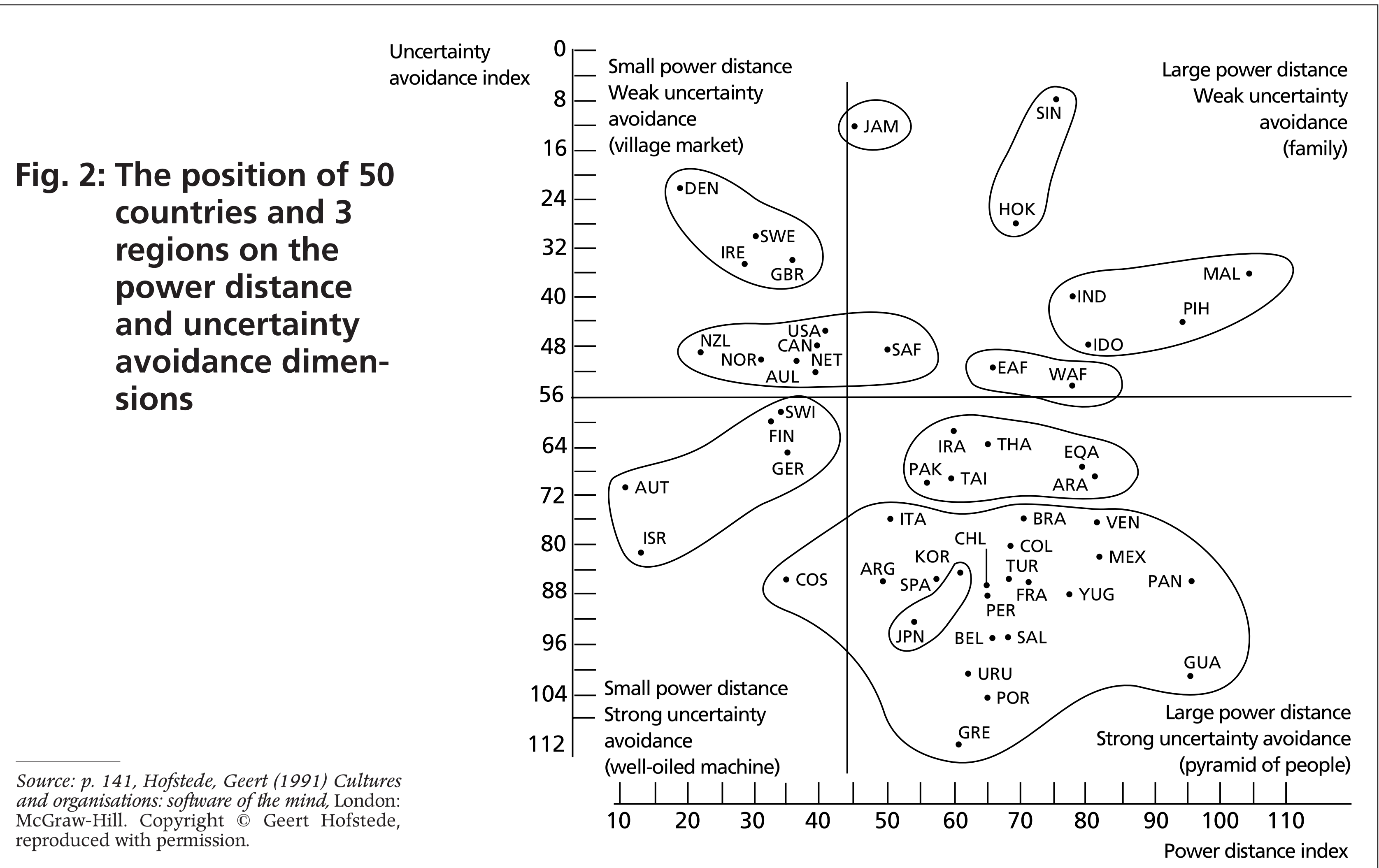
After several rounds of research, he reduced the differences in culture to four basic dimensions. All other differences, he stated, could be traced back to one or several of these four basic dimensions of culture. The four dimensions Hofstede identified were what he called power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. After some additional research, he added the dimension of time orientation.

Power distance indicates the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organisations is distributed unequally among individuals. Power distance is about hierarchy, about, for instance, what is considered a normal decision-making-process in a youth organisation. Should everybody have a say on an equal level? Or is the chairman of the board considered to be able to make decisions by him/herself, when necessary?

Uncertainty avoidance indicates the extent to which a society feels threatened by ambiguous situations and tries to avoid them by providing rules or other means of security. Uncertainty avoidance relates e.g. to the extent in which people like to take risks, or how much detail members of a prep-team would like to discuss in planning a training course. How much room is there for chance, improvisation, or things just going the way they go (and then maybe wrong)?

Individualism/Collectivism indicates the extent to which a society is a loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care

Fig. 2: The position of 50 countries and 3 regions on the power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions



Source: p. 141, Hofstede, Geert (1991) Cultures and organisations: software of the mind, London: McGraw-Hill. Copyright © Geert Hofstede, reproduced with permission.

only of themselves and their immediate families, instead of a tight social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups and expect their in-group to look after them. In collectivist cultures, for example, people feel strongly related and responsible for their families, and preferably look at themselves as member of various groups.

Masculinity/Femininity indicates the extent to which gender determines the roles men and women have in society. Is there, for instance, an almost "natural" division of tasks between the male and female participants in a seminar that demands some household tasks should be taken over by everybody?

Time orientation indicates the extent to which a society bases its decisions on tradition and events in the past, or on short term, present-tense gains, or on what is perceived desirable for the future. How important, for example, do you think is the history of your region for today, and for the future? When people try to show off with where they come from: Do they talk about the past, the present, or the future?

Hofstede provides for several grids in which he places different societies (nations) on values along these dimensions. These values are based on the evaluation of the questionnaires and repeated research on the basis of this model (see Fig2, page 21).

Hofstede's model has been praised for its empirical basis; hardly any other study or theory of culture can offer a similar quantitative support. On the other hand, the model gives no explanation why exactly there should be only five dimensions, and why only these dimensions are the basic components of culture. Furthermore, the model implies culture to be static rather than dynamic, why or how cultures develop cannot be explained within the model. In addition, Hofstede has been criticised for focusing only on culture as a trait of nations, and having no eye for the cultural diversity that prevails in most modern societies, for sub-cultures, mixed cultures, and individual development. The description of the dimensions, at times, has the danger of implicitly valuing some cultures as being "better" than others. Still, for many readers, the model's five dimensions seem intuitively very relevant to the make-up of societies.

Relevance for youth work

One might not agree with Hofstede that his five dimensions are the only ones to make up culture. Still, they very often turn out to be essential elements of cultural differences and are therefore helpful in understanding conflict between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. Participants start immediately comparing different national "cultures" on the charts of Hofstede: am I really more hierarchical? Do I really need more security than others? – So while on the one hand, Hofstede's dimensions provide a framework in which one can interpret cultural misunderstandings, and start addressing these differences with participants (e.g.: What is your idea about power and leadership?), on the other hand they make us immediately think about ourselves and question if they apply to everybody in a given country.
Still, the dimensions are useful as well as a frame of reference when trying to analyse the different contexts we live in (our student "culture", the "culture" of our family and friends, the "culture" of rural or urban areas, etc.). It is worth asking ourselves, to what extent does this give us more insights – and to what extent do we just create more stereotypes?
In addition, the five dimensions, and one's preferences along these dimensions, raise the question of cultural relativity: is there really no "better" or "worse"? Are hierarchical structures just as good as equal ones? Are strict and closed gender roles just as good as open ones? How far does it go? And, if we want to mediate in a cultural conflict along those dimensions, should we, and can we, take up a neutral stand?

2.4.3 Edward T. and Mildred Reed Hall's behavioural components of culture

This couple developed their model of culture from a very practical point of view: They wanted to give good advice to US-American businessmen who were to travel and work abroad. In their study that involved many in-depth, open-ended interviews with people in different cultures that US-American businessmen were likely to co-operate with, they focused on those, sometimes subtle, differences in behaviour that usually accounted for conflicts in intercultural communication.

On the basis of their study they developed several dimensions of difference. These dimensions were all associated with either communication patterns, or with space, or time:

Fast and Slow Messages refer to "the speed with which a particular message can be decoded and acted on". Examples of fast messages include headlines, advertisements and television. Becoming easily familiar is also typical of people who tend more towards fast messages. Whereas in essence, it takes time to get to know people well (they are "slow messages"), in some cultures it takes less time to make friends than in others, easy familiarity is thus an example of a fast message. Slow messages are e.g. art, a TV-documentary, deep relationships, etc.

High and Low Context are about the information that surrounds an event. If in the actually transmitted message at a given time only little information is given, and most of the information is already present in the persons who communicate, the situation is one of high context. For example, communication between a couple that has lived together for several years tends to be very high context: only little information needs to be exchanged at any given time in order for them to understand each other. The message may be very short, but is decoded with the help of the information about each other that both have acquired in the years of living together.

Typical high context cultures are, according to Hall & Hall (1990), the Japanese, Arab, and Mediterranean cultures with extensive information networks and involvement in many close personal relationships. Consequently, not a lot of background information is needed in daily life, nor is it expected. One keeps oneself informed about everything having to do with the persons important to oneself.

Typical low context cultures are the US-American, German, Swiss and Scandinavian cultures. Personal relationships tend to be split up more according to the different areas of one's involvement, and there is a higher need for background information in normal transactions.

Misunderstandings can arise from not taking into account the different communication styles in terms of high and low context. A person with a low-context style, for example, may be perceived by a high-context person as talking too much, being over-precise, and providing unnecessary information. Inversely, a person with a high-context style may be perceived by a low-context person as not truthful (since information is "hidden"), and not co-operative. In order to make decisions, low-context persons want a fairly large amount of background information, whereas high-context persons would base decisions on less background information at a given time, since they have constantly kept themselves up with the process of what is going on. The paradoxical situation however arises when high-context persons are asked to evaluate a new enterprise and then they want to know everything, since they have not been part of the context of that new idea.

Territoriality relates to the organisation of physical space, e.g. in an office. Is the president's office on the top floor of the building, or somewhere in the middle? If, for example, one considers the pens on one's desk as part of personal territory others are not appreciated when just borrowing these pens without asking. Territoriality is about the sense people have developed of the space and the material things around them, and is also an indication of power.

Personal Space is the distance to other people one needs to feel comfortable. The Halls describe personal space as a "bubble" each person carries around at all times. It changes its size according to the situation and the people one interacts with (people you are close friends with are allowed closer than others). The "bubble" indicates what one feels is an appropriate distance to another person. Somebody standing further away is considered distanced, somebody trying to get closer than what is perceived as the appropriate distance might seem offending, intimidating, or simply rude. If the normal conversational distance of one culture is rather close so that it overlaps with what is considered an intimate distance in a different culture, a problem in communication might just arise from the different interpretations of what the chosen physical distance to one another means.

Monochronic and Polychronic Time relate to the structuring of one's time. Monochronic timing means to do one thing at a time, working with schedules where one thing follows the other, where different tasks have their time assigned to them. Time for monochronic cultures is very

hands-on, it can almost be touched and is talked about as a resource: spending, wasting, and saving time. Time is linear, it extends as one line from the past through the present into the future. Time is used as a tool to structure the day, and to decide levels of importance, e.g. not "having time" to meet somebody. Polychronic timing means the opposite: many tasks are done at the same time, there is high involvement with people, which implies more emphasis on relating to others than on holding to a schedule. Polychronic time is not so much perceived as a resource, and could rather be compared to a point than to a line.

Hall & Hall perceive some of these dimensions we have described as being inter-related. Monochronic time in their research is closely linked to low-context and to a design of space that allows the compartmentalization of life (a structure where different areas of involvements are separated from one another, or put into different "compartments"). In addition to the dimensions mentioned, Hall & Hall introduce several other concepts as important to be attentive to, e.g. how scheduling in a culture works, how much time ahead meetings should be arranged, what is considered appropriate in terms of punctuality, and how fast information flows in a system – is the flow bound to an hierarchical system (up/down), or does it flow more like a large network in all directions?
In dealing with other cultures, Hall & Hall suggest to their target group, US-American businessmen, to recognize the cultural differences and, if possible, to adapt to the different ways of behaving in the culture they work in.

Hall & Hall's key concepts when describing different cultures point out some significant differences that people experience in intercultural encounters and therefore are very recognizable to many readers. However, some criticism has been raised as well. Hall & Hall design their dimensions as independent from one another in the first place, but develop them into a model of culture that eventually is only one-dimensional. It orders cultures on a continuum between monochronic, low-context cultures on the one hand, and polychronic, high context cultures on the other hand. All other categories are related to this continuum. The question is if this very simple way of categorising cultures is a reflection of reality.

In addition, only a little is said about the why behind these cultural characteristics, about how cultures develop (are they static or dynamic), or about how individuals deal with their cultural background in intercultural situations.
The usefulness in Hall & Hall's approach is clearly in its very practical consequences. The dimensions – very much along the same lines as the Hofstede model – give a framework in which to recognise and interpret cultural differences.

Relevance for youth work

In intercultural groups, the dimensions introduced by Hall & Hall can function well as a first "theoretical" approach to cultural differences. They lend themselves to very nice exercises, e.g. having participants talk to each other and, while talking, change the distance they have towards each other. Do both have the same feeling of an appropriate distance? How would they deal with somebody needing less/more space?
Once described, the dimensions of Hall & Hall usually relate easily to differences that are experienced by participants in an intercultural group. They can invite a group to talk about these differences without putting a value of "better" or "worse" to them.
In addition, youth workers may find these dimensions useful in recognising intercultural differences in a group (e.g., how people deal with punctuality, if they like to be touched or not, if they feel you talk too much or too little, etc.), and having a vocabulary to describe them. But, once introduced, be warned that participants will find the Hall & Hall dimension readily available to excuse anything: "I am sorry, I am not one hour late, I am polychronic!" …

2.4.4 Jacques Demorgon and Markus Molz's discussion of culture

Explicitly, Jacques Demorgon and Markus Molz (1996) deny any pretension of introducing yet another model of culture. It is in the very nature of culture, they say, that any definition of culture is basically biased by the (cultural) background of the one defining: one cannot be un-cultured. Consequently, Demorgon and Molz understand their article as a contribution to look at the discussion about culture and what one can learn from it.

The particularly controversial parts in this discussion about culture, they say, lead to three main contradictions:

– How to deal with the tension between cultural stability and long-lasting cultural structures on the one hand, and processes of cultural change and innovation on the other hand?
– How to deal with the relationship between "culture" and "interculture": was "culture" first, and then became "input" for intercultural encounters? Or does culture only exist in its constant interactions with other cultures?
– Should one emphasise the universal aspects of all humans (what everyone has in common), and conceive of humans as *individuals*, where culture becomes just a trait of that individual, or where there is only one, global culture (the *universalistic approach*)? Or should one emphasize the role of culture, recognize the prevailing diversity in the world, and conceive of humans as belonging to a cultural group, where all cultures are in principal equally good (the *relativistic approach*)?

These issues might appear to be rather academic and of no practical value. However, they have political consequences: is change perceived as threatening or not? (question 1) Is diversity in a country perceived as a pre-condition for culture, or is it a threat to what is thought of as the "original" culture? (question 2) Are inhabitants of a country perceived as individuals that have to be treated equally (the French model of individual rights), or as members of a group, that have rights as a group (the Dutch model of society as being composed of different groups that all have their own institutions)? (question 3).

In their attempt to overcome these tensions, Demorgon and Molz introduce what I would call a model of culture. Culture can only be understood, they say, when one connects it with the concept of adaptation. Humans are constantly challenged to establish a lasting relationship between their inner world (needs, ideas, etc.) and the outer world (environment, other people, etc.). They do this in concrete situations that should form the basis for analysis. In all of these situations, individuals shape their environment (every person can influence what is happening around him/herself), and are shaped by their environment (every person can change with what is happening around him/herself). Both, shaping the environment, and being shaped by it, are the two sides of the coin "adaptation".

More scientifically, Demorgon and Molz define the one side of that coin as "assimilation". By that they mean the process in which humans adapt the outer world to their reality. What we perceive outside is put into the already existing drawers and structures in the brain. An extreme example of assimilation could be children who play. Any big pile of sand (the outer world's reality) could be seen by them as Mount Everest (an inner imagination). While they climb that pile, they have assimilated the reality to their own imagination; that interpretation of reality has become the framework of their action. They are not climbing a pile of sand, but the Mount Everest. But not only children assimilate: when we see somebody for the first time, we get an impression of how he/she looks. On the basis of that limited information, we interpret who he/she is – and we use the information existing in our brain, often stereotypes, to "know" more about that person, and to decide how we can most appropriately behave.

The other side of the coin Demorgon and Molz call "accommodation". By this they mean the process in which structures in the brain (what they call "cognitions" or "schemes") are changed according to information from the outside world. We might meet somebody and in the beginning interpret his/her behaviour in terms of our stereotypes. But after a while we could learn that the reality is different, that our stereotypes, our schemes in the brain, do not correspond with reality. So we change them.

Neither extreme accommodation nor extreme assimilation is helpful. In a modus of extreme accommodation, we would be overwhelmed by all the outside information that we need to deal with, that we have a "fresh" look at, and that we let change the way we think. In a modus of extreme assimilation, we would negate reality and, at the end of the day, be unable to survive.

In comparison with animals, humans are genetically less pre-formed, fewer things are already biologically "arranged" for us. Therefore, there are many situations in which we do not have

an instinctive or biologically pre-determined reaction. We have a need to develop a system that gives us orientation in all of these situations that helps us to adapt successfully. This system is what Demorgon and Molz call culture. The function of adaptation is then to maintain or enlarge the possibility to act appropriately in as many situations that could arise as possible. Culture then is the structure that gives orientation in these situations (it has to be understood as the structures in the brain that are the basis for processes of assimilation and accommodation), it is the continuation of biological nature. Culture exists because of the necessity to find orientation where this is not biologically pre-determined.

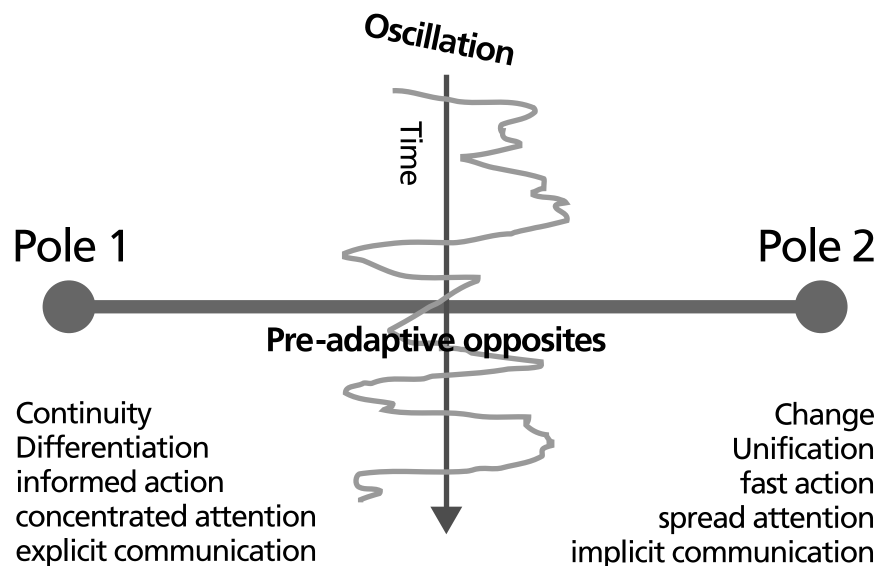
If adaptation then is about finding orientation, it exists in a tension between assimilation and accommodation. On the one hand, we have a need to develop stable structures, sets of behaviour that we can generalise and use in all kinds of situations, since we cannot start from scratch (or with an empty brain) all the time. In this assimilation-mode, culture is the mental software, as Hofstede has put it, the software that is used to process all information available in the outside world.

But, Demorgon and Molz point out, if culture was only a mental software, programmed into humans when they are young, we could not adjust to new circumstances, and change our orientation accordingly. Humans need the ability for accommodation, for changing their orientation and frames of reference, in order to survive.

Behaviour in any given situation, then, is almost always a mixture between repeating a learned, successful, culturally orientated set of actions, and careful adjustment to the given situation.

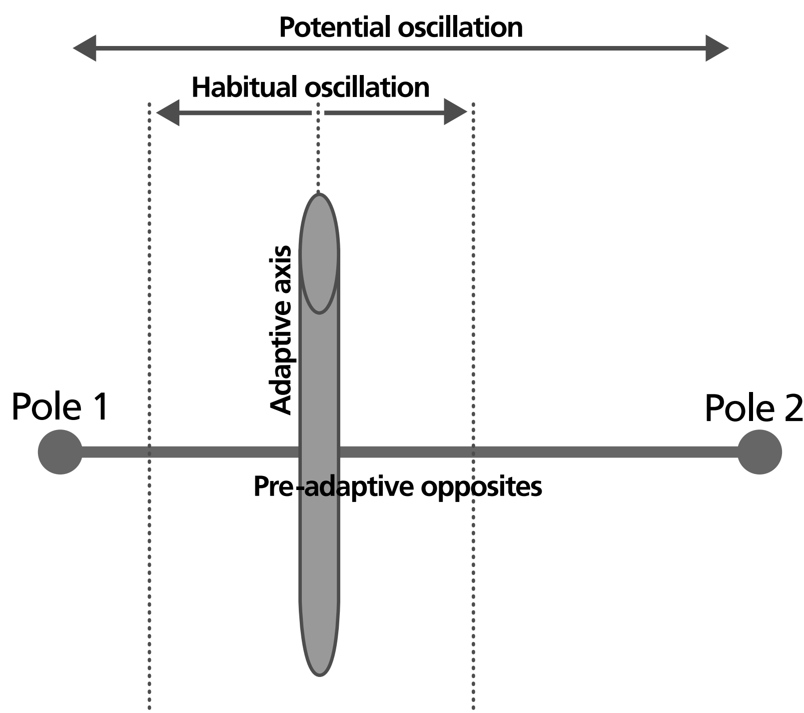
If we look at such a situation, from the outset we have a wide range of behaviour options between opposites: we can act quickly, but without thorough information; or be informed, but act at a slower pace. We can concentrate on one aspect of the situation, or diffuse our attention to everything that is happening around us. We can communicate explicitly (with very in-depth explanations), or implicitly (using a lot of symbols). If we understand a situation as offering us hundreds of these possibilities between two opposites, we constantly need to decide which one to take (see the examples fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Chosen pre-adaptive opposites and oscillation



Source: p.54, Thomas, Alexander (ed) (1996) Psychologie interkulturellen Handelns, Gottingen: Hogrefe. Chapter by J. Demorgen and M. Molz 'Bedingungen und Auswirkungen der Analyse von Kultur(en) und Interkulturellen Interaktionen'. Adapted version

Fig. 4



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One can picture these opposites as two poles on a line (see fig. 4). The whole line then represents the whole potential of behaviour. Cultural orientation, Demorgon and Molz state, is about limiting the potential on that line to a smaller range. Imagine the points on the line numbered between 0 and 10 (with 0 being one extreme, and 10 the other). Cultural orientation sets the appropriate behaviour on a certain point, e.g. 3. As cultural beings, we take that for a start and choose the most appropriate behaviour according to the situation around that point. In the example you could say that as a habit, we usually choose solutions between 2 and 4.

Let's take communication. You come from a place, for example, where people communicate very implicitly (that is, avoiding long explanations but referring a lot implicitly to the context, to what "everybody knows"). What is commonly perceived as appropriate communication, as "normal", is rather implicit. You choose that as a starting point, and develop a habitual range around that starting point. That is, you may communicate a bit more implicitly, or a bit less implicitly, depending on the situation, but you never communicate very explicitly. Only by learning, by experiencing situations where your "range" of behaviour was not successful, you might enlarge your range and have the potential to communicate explicitly – although it may remain feeling strange to you.

Culture is about defining appropriate decisions between two extremes in adaptation. A cultural orientation tells in an abstract way what for a group of people has been a successful behaviour in the past.
A range around that orientation, around what is perceived appropriate, is tolerated as "normal" deviations, as normal adaptations to the situations. Behaviour that is outside of that range is perceived as disturbing, wrong, not normal.

Cultures may change: When the range around a certain orientation is extended into one direction, when the behaviour of the people making

up that culture constantly tends towards one side, the original orientation may gradually move towards that side.

Culture, in this concept, is not linked to nation. It is essentially about orientation of groups of people. Orientation is given by, e.g., family, friends, language, where you live, who you live or work together with, etc. On the basis of all of these, groups can be identified that share some orientations, some culture. Depending on the context, individuals may have varying set standards and varying ranges around these standards. For example, at work you may communicate more or less explicitly, whereas at home you may communicate more or less implicitly. Still, if there is a common ground between work and family, both ranges may be very close to each other and overlap to a large extent.

In intercultural learning, people become aware of where their cultural orientation is through confrontation with a different standard. In having to live with both orientations, people enlarge the range of how they can behave, they enlarge their habits to encompass both cultural orientations. Depending on the situation, then, they will have more options to choose from. The wider the range, in principle, the more possibility for accommodation, for adapting one's behaviour to the outside world. This wider range, however, goes hand in hand with more insecurity: More options create less stable situations.

Intercultural mediators can be those persons, who have developed a range that encompasses the cultural standards of both sides, and that open up possibilities for a common "meeting point" between what is perceived as appropriate behaviour from the different sides.

Demorgon and Molz's ideas about culture have attracted many people since they bring together lots of different strands of theory and models on culture. On the other hand, the model is purely theoretical, and allows itself to only very limited empirical research. Is it possible to test if their model resembles reality? Still, the very best test might be the usefulness of the model to better understand and interpret intercultural encounters.

Relevance for youth work

Demorgon and Molz's ideas about culture can help to get a deeper understanding of the necessity and function of culture. In addition, it relates culture as a concept to groups on all levels, and not to nations alone.

In youth work, the model with its complexity might better meet the demands of complex questions raised, and open up a new depth of reflections.

In practical terms, the model gives an understanding of what intercultural learning is about: about getting to know oneself, and about stretching one's own possibilities of action, one's own range of dealing with various situations. It clearly relates this learning to experience and points out, on the other hand, that learning is challenging since it is connected to a very basic need of human existence: orientation.

2.5 Looking at intercultural learning

Milton J. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

Bennett (1993) defines intercultural sensitivity in terms of stages of personal growth. His developmental model posits a continuum of increasing sophistication in dealing with cultural difference, moving from ethnocentrism through stages of greater recognition and acceptance of difference, which Bennett calls "ethnorelativism".
The main underlying concept of Bennett's model is what he calls "differentiation", and how one develops the ability to recognize and live with difference. "Differentiation" then refers to two phenomena: first, that people view one and the same thing in a variety of ways, and second, that "cultures differ from one another in the way that they maintain patterns of differentiation, or worldviews". This second aspect refers to the fact that in Bennett's view, cultures offer ways on how to interpret reality, how one should perceive the world around us. This interpretation of reality, or worldview, is different from one culture to the other. Developing intercultural sensitivity then means in essence to learn to recognize and deal with, the fundamental difference between cultures in perceiving the world.

Fig. 5: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The Ethnocentric Stages

1. Denial
Isolation
Separation

2. Defense
Denigration
Superiority
Reversal

3. Minimization
Physical Universalism
Transcendent Universalism

The Ethnorelative Stages

4. Acceptance
Respect for
Behavioural Difference
Respect for Value Difference

5. Adaptation
Empathy
Pluralism

6. Integration
Contextual Evaluation
Constructive Marginality

Source: quoted from p. 29, Paige, R. Michael (ed) (1993) Education for the intercultural experience, Yarmouth :Intercultural Press, chapter by Milton J. Bennett 'Towards ethnorelativism: a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity'

The ethnocentric stages

Ethnocentrism is understood by Bennett as a stage where the individual assumes that his/her view of the world is essentially central to reality. ***Denial*** is at the very basic of an ethnocentric worldview, and means that an individual denies that there is any difference, that other views of reality do exist. This denial can be based on isolation, where there are little or no chances to be confronted with difference, so that its existence cannot be experienced; or it can be based on separation, where difference is intentionally separated, where an individual or a group set up barriers between people that are "different" on purpose, in order not to be confronted with difference. Separation, therefore, needs at least a moment of recognition of difference, and is a development for that reason over isolation. The racial segregation that can still be found in the world is an example of this stage of separation.

People of oppressed groups tend not to experience the stage of denial, since it is hard to deny that there is a difference, if it is your being different or viewing the world differently that is being denied.

As a second stage, Bennett describes ***defense***. Cultural difference can be perceived as threatening, since it offers alternatives to one's own sense of reality and thus to one's identity. In the defense stage, therefore, difference is perceived, but it is fought against.

The most common strategy of that fighting is denigration, where the differing worldview is evaluated negatively. Stereotyping and, in its extreme form, racism are examples of strategies of denigration. The other side of denigration is superiority, where the emphasis is more on the positive attributes of one's own culture, and no or little attention to the other, which implicitly is valued lower. Sometimes also a third strategy to deal with the threatening part of difference is encountered; this is called "reversal" by Bennett. Reversal means that one values the other culture as the superior one, denigrating one's own cultural background. This strategy may appear more sensitive at the first sight, but practically only means the replacement of one centre of ethnocentrism (one's own cultural background) with another.

The last stage of ethnocentrism Bennett calls ***minimization***. Difference is acknowledged, it may not be fought any more by strategies of denigration or superiority, but an attempt is made to minimize its meaning. Similarities are pointed out as far outweighing cultural difference, which by that is trivialized. Many organisations, Bennett points out, seem to perceive what he calls minimization as the final stage of intercultural development, and work towards a world of shared values and common grounds. These common grounds are built on physical universalism, that is on the basic biological similarities between humans. We all must eat, digest and die. If culture is just a sort of continuation of biology, its meaning is minimized.

The ethnorelative stages

"Fundamental to ethnorelativism is the assumption that cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behaviour can only be understood within a cultural context". In the ethnorelative stages, difference is not any more perceived as a threat but as a challenge. An attempt is made to develop new categories for understanding rather than to preserve existing ones.

Ethnorelativism begins with the ***acceptance*** of cultural difference. First, this acceptance begins with accepting that verbal and non-verbal behaviour varies across cultures and that all of these variations deserve respect. Second, this acceptance is enlarged to the underlying views of the world and values. This second stage implies knowledge of one's own values, and the perception of these values as culturally made. Values are understood as process and as a tool to organize the world, rather that as something one "has". Even values that imply the denigration of a particular group can then be viewed as having a function in organizing the world, without excluding that one has an opinion about that value.

Building on accepting cultural difference, ***adaptation*** is the following stage. Adaptation has to be seen in contrast to assimilation, where different values, worldviews, or behaviours are taken over while giving up one's own identity. Adaptation is a process of addition. New behaviour that is appropriate to a different worldview is learned and added to one's repertoire of behaving, with new styles of communication being at the forefront. Culture here needs to be seen as a process, something that develops and flows, rather than a static thing.

Central to adaptation is empathy, the ability to experience a situation different from that presented by one's own cultural background. It is the attempt to understand the other by taking up his or her perspective.

In the stage of pluralism, empathy is enlarged so that an individual can rely on several distinct frames of reference, or multiple cultural frames. The development of these frames usually necessitates living in a different cultural context for a longer time. Difference is then perceived as part of one's normal self, as one has internalised it in two or more different cultural frames.

Bennett calls his final set of stages ***integration***. Whereas in the adaptation stage several frames of reference exist next to each other within one person, in the integration-stage an attempt is made to integrate the various frames to one that is not a re-establishment of one culture, nor a simple comfort with peaceful co-existence of different worldviews. Integration demands an ongoing definition of one's own identity in terms of lived experiences. It can lead to not belonging to any culture any more, but being an integrated outsider always.

Contextual evaluation as the first stage of integration is about the ability to evaluate different situations and worldviews from one or more cultural backgrounds. In all other stages, evaluation has been avoided in order to overcome ethnocentric evaluations. In the stage of contextual evaluation individuals are able to shift between cultural contexts, depending on the circumstances. The evaluation made is one of relative goodness. Bennett gives the example of an intercultural choice: "Is it good to refer directly to a mistake you made by yourself or someone else? In most American contexts, it is good. In most Japanese contexts, it is bad. However, it might be good in some cases to use an American style in Japan, and vice versa. The ability to use both styles is part adaptation. The ethical consideration of context in making a choice is part of integration".

As a final stage, constructive marginality is described by Bennett as some sort of arrival point, and not as the end of learning. It implies a state of total self-reflectiveness, of not belonging to any culture but being an outsider. Reaching that stage, on the other hand, allows for true intercultural mediation, the ability to operate within different worldviews.

Bennett's model has proven to be a good starting point for the design of trainings and orientations that deal with developing intercultural sensitivity. It underlines the importance of difference in intercultural learning, and points out some of the (non-efficient) strategies of how to deal with difference.

Bennett implies that intercultural learning is a process that is characterized by continuous advancement (with the possibility of moving back and forth in that process), and that it is possible to measure the stage an individual has reached in terms of intercultural sensitivity. One may want to ask, however, if the process of intercultural learning will always follow exactly this sequence, with one step being the pre-condition for the next one. But if then interpreted less strictly in terms of stages that have to follow each other, and rather in terms of different strategies to deal with difference that are applied according to circumstances and abilities, the model reveals essential obstacles and helpful ways in intercultural learning.

Relevance for youth work

The different stages that Bennett describes form a useful frame of reference to look at groups and most appropriate contents and methods of training to develop intercultural sensitivity. Is it necessary to raise awareness of difference, or should one concentrate on accepting these differences? The idea of development provides for a very hands-on approach to what needs to be worked on. Bennett suggests himself consequences for training in the various phases.

In an international youth event, many of the processes Bennett describe happen in a very condensed way. His model is helpful in looking at and understanding what is going on and how one can deal with that.

Lastly, the developmental model clearly suggests what is an aim for working on intercultural learning: to arrive at a stage where difference is perceived as normal, is integrated into one's identity, and where reference can be made to several cultural frames of reference.

2.6 Summary

Having looked at different ideas about learning, culture, and intercultural experiences, it may have become clear that intercultural learning

is a process. This process demands that you know yourself, and where you come from, before being able to understand others. It is a challenging process as it involves very deeply rooted ideas about what is good and bad, about structuring the world and your life. In intercultural learning, what we take for granted and feel is necessary to hold on to, is put into question. Intercultural learning is a challenge to one's identity – but it can become a way of living, a way of enriching one's identity at the same time, as Bennett has pointed out.

Bennett has also given his model a more political outlook: whereas intercultural learning is an individual process, it is essentially about learning how to live together, learning how to live in a diverse world. Intercultural learning seen in this perspective is the starting point of living together peacefully.

2.7 A look at intercultural education

Despite the fact that this T-Kit concentrates on intercultural learning outside of school, this chapter is included in recognition of the fact that the school is still one of the strongest forces which could help further the development of intercultural societies. Clearly, many lessons can be learned from the experience of formal educators.

In the past, education was given on an equal social basis, a school for everybody, promoting justice to diminish differences and targeting social integration. Today the major issue in our society is how to deal with difference? How should we recognise and valorise cultural differences and, at the same time, promote the authentic cultural integration and integral development of our students, first at school, and, later on, in society?

Intercultural principles concentrate on openness to the other, active respect for difference, mutual comprehension, active tolerance, validating the cultures present, providing equality of opportunities, fighting discrimination. Communication between different cultural identities can appear paradoxical in the sense that it requires recognition of the other both as similar and as different. In this context, according to Ouellet (1991), intercultural education can be designed to promote and to develop:

- a better comprehension of cultures in modern societies;
- a larger capacity of communication between people from different cultures;
- a more flexible attitude to the context of cultural diversity in society;
- a better capacity of participation in social interaction, and the recognition of the common heritage of humanity.

The principal aim of intercultural education is to promote and to develop the capacities of interaction and communication between pupils and the world that surrounds them. Among the consequences of this, according to Guerra (1993), we should ensure that:

- pluralism has to be a component of the education given to all pupils (whether they belong to minority groups or not);
- minorities are not obliged to forget their cultural references;
- every culture is to be equally valued;
- support mechanisms are in place to guarantee similar success rates for the children who belong to minorities as well as for majorities.

However, in the development of intercultural education approaches there is a danger of our action being biased, more or less consciously. Intending to warn teachers of this, Ladmiral and Lipiansky (1989) indicate two "traps" that the teacher must avoid:
1) reducing the cultural reality of pupils to quick generalisations;
2) interpreting systematically all conflicts from a cultural standpoint, forgetting the psychological and sociological factors which have contributed to such behaviour;
Abdallah-Preteceille adds a third one: searching to resolve difficulties exclusively through rational knowledge of the other.

Teachers need to remember that education is an extremely exacting activity. It is extremely exacting not only from the pupil's perspective but also taking into account the surrounding environment and even the personality of the teacher. Teachers should analyse their own cultural identities and personalities in order to inform their own pedagogical practice. It is like this that Hoopes (quoted by Ouellet – 1991) advises that teachers develop their capacities for

analysing their perception models and communication styles and increase their ability to listen. (I believe that this will be more real if we concentrate on active listening). In addition, it is fundamental that the teacher be conscious of her/his own culture and perceives the mechanisms of his/her preconceptions, beliefs, moral principles and values.

Intercultural education places the other at the centre of relations. It encourages a continuous questioning of presuppositions, of things we normally take for granted and encourages a constant opening to the unknown and the not understood. In a process of interaction and mutual discovery every human being can fulfil himself or herself – personally, socially and globally. The educational relationship is based on the promotion of pupil empowerment to enable them to function fully within society.

It is not enough to define a vision in legislation of all that the school should be doing in promoting intercultural education in any specific nation or region. What is indeed urgent nowadays is that these visions be **really** implemented, promoted and developed throughout teacher training initiatives and eventually towards the promotion of a change of consciousness among the population in general. This can be delayed no longer, because, if we don't do this, which human being will be there to help us to grow up? "To educate is to help to learn to be" as the well known French politician Edgar Faure (1908-1988) reminds us. And we, teachers, also in a constant process of becoming, where are our reference points? We need more research carried out by teachers themselves. In a very big way, the present and the future are in the hands of teachers and it is urgent to bring about change!

The school's double function of educating and training must ensure the maximum development of each one of its pupils, ensuring that their cultures are transmitted in a spirit of openness to others. Several educational system reforms recommend using the inductive teaching method, centred on the interests of the pupil. Here we need to see how direct experience can be used to increase respect of difference and to heighten intercultural sensitivity. Then the teacher, as a central agent of change, should offer learning experiences and opportunities that promote and accept all cultures in a spirit of democracy. Thus, intercultural education must be the objective of all schools in today's society! If we don't follow this, we risk creating an impoverished uniformity which is based on segregation and elitism!

If our educational efforts can show people in all their cultural differences and similarities, demonstrating the right of cultures to develop themselves, we shall see more active participation in society. We will be working in an educational system which is against division and for a new consciousness towards a society open to respect between peoples. Intercultural education needs to pervade the school and society, both horizontally and vertically, if we are to work for the fulfilment of every human being. And, who knows, perhaps we will see a future of transcultural education!