

Cultural diversity

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Abstract

The article departs from Human Rights which, defined as equal rights and equal opportunities, do correspond with cultural diversity, ensuring all kinds of minorities or subcultures not to become disadvantaged.

The author rejects all kinds of culturalism (as if groups or even nations are culturally homogenous or determine human action totally), but rather operationalize cultural diversity as a setting in which people act according to different rules- despite all commonalities. Education is insofar the growing of transcultural personalities who are able to cope with any situation in which different rules interfere. In order to exclude discrimination or disadvantages it is crucial, too, that – particularly in competitive settings, only those cultural items are under consideration which are important to fulfil a task.



All human beings have equal rights and form one community, with plenty of common feelings, needs, ambitions and problems. Human rights are universal.

It is a widespread, also official consensus that human rights are equal rights, i.e. are valid for everybody regardless which particular person is concerned. This verdict on discrimination is to be found in all documents in the context of United Nations, Council of Europe etc.

Discrimination

Actually there are, however, differences; we do distinguish and thus “discriminate” people, for instance according to their age or sex. It seems to be universal that you address differently young or old people, girls and boys etc. Whereas these categories seem to be “natural”, the place of birth or the religious beliefs are not. They are based on particular, individual information. And of course, even the “natural” features are not relevant in many situations. Following a constructivist approach we understand all these categories as a product of a societal process which makes “differences”, i.e. counts the years since birth, perceives the gender or raises the question of where people come from.



The German Basic Law (which has constitutional status) enumerates those categories which constitute differences, but must not justify privileges (Art. 3). This list includes gender, descent, mother tongue, home country, religious belief, political convictions and health status. The list also refers to “race” – a category which is not acceptable at all, as it – indirectly – gives support to any kind of “racism”. If the term makes any sense, then we must understand that human beings constitute one race. Actually, people have always been “discriminated” against, i.e. excluded, persecuted or underprivileged “because” of the colour of their skin, i.e. pretending that one colour of skin has more value than another.

These categories are social ones, as the society has constructed them, defined them as relevant: relevant as to how to perceive and treat other persons or groups of persons. The human rights approach accepts and enhances the categories, in order to proclaim that they do not matter – as far as all people have equal opportunities.

The access to positions in the economic or political system can be closed formally, by explicit restrictions. This had been the case, for instance, for a long time in the German Army, which did not accept (except in the medical services) female professionals. It is still open as to whether it is a kind of age discrimination that workers older than 65 are obliged to leave their workplace and enter the pension system.

Mostly, discrimination is a process which “happens” naturally and can be evidenced only indirectly with regard to the relevant category, maybe gender or physical status or the percentages compared. E.g. does the percentage in society correspond with that in this institution or that position? Thus you can find out that there are more female students than male ones, but only 10% of all professors are female.

Interestingly enough the categories of concern do change. So until recently the proportional presentation of religious denominations in the political system of Germany and other states was an import issue. The liberty of religion, however, includes the right of privacy; nobody has to indicate any more his/her religion. This is just one reason why the category of religion does not matter anymore. Another reason is that – for whatever position (outside the churches) – it is the individual qualification which counts. The religious beliefs are seen to contribute to professional competences only marginally.

One way to solve the problem of underrepresentation is to introduce an institutional rule, the quota: Under the condition of equal competences members of the underprivileged group get the vacant position as long as the underrepresentation exists. This is fair, also according to the Supreme (Constitutional) Court in Germany or the European Court, because the qualification remains the most important factor. It would not be fair to prefer a person in spite of his/her lower qualification, as it was unfair before when a

person was not accepted because of his/her gender or handicap.

We remember times when, officially or practically, particular groups, maybe the noble class, the army offices or medical doctors, did their own recruiting, i.e. perpetuated the closed shop. Those who can present themselves as a member of a particular group, have better chances of being appointed for a position this group can decide upon. Of course, it is – beside the material resources available - the model of the parents, the attitude of the social class, and the ethics of the profession which enables the new generation to become an entrepreneur, a medical doctor or an artist like the parents. Corporate identities must not reproduce themselves over generations.

There still remains the question whether personal competences can be judged with no regard to the person and the categories according which s/he can be characterized. And even more, the question is whether a person can achieve within the education system all the personal competences which are necessary. The cultural capital which learners also have to acquire has to fit the standards required by the labour market or employers. Hence the principle of equality (equal opportunity) has a cultural dimension.

Among the categories, which may contribute to discrimination, there is language. Obviously, even more than religion, the mother tongue is an important part of the individual identity, and at the same time it is a category which is used to determine a group, by the group itself and/or by others. Again a strong cultural dimension comes into focus. Isn't it a bold promise that nobody should have disadvantages due to his/her language? Sociolinguists (among others Bernstein 1962), have given evidence to the fact that children from a lower social class may have to overcome a language barrier similar to learning a foreign language, i.e. the "elaborated" code of the upper middle class if they want to achieve good results in schools (which are institutions governed and executed by the upper middle class). This may also be true for children from rural areas or particular regions, whose mother language is a dialect with little similarities to the standard language.

Under the auspices of multicultural, i.e. more or less multilingual societies, the problem is even more dramatic: Children who are raised in a family from Italy, Turkey or Iraq do not have equal opportunities in a German school or any other institutions where German is the only standard.

A first summary: There seem to be various cultural aspects of human rights, which have to be clarified; particularly cultural diversity and monolingual/monocultural institutions and practices are two areas that do not fit to each other.

Culture

We are witnessing situations like the following: some people are joining hands, others giving hugs, some are wearing turbans or veils, others hats, some are refraining from eating beef or pork or meat at all, some are dictating orders to their staff, but others are discussing the problem extensively.

If we are part of those situations, be it as actor or observer, would we deem those situations “strange” – because we are not familiar with them: so it is the others who then are strange?

No, they are not. We can explain the situation in terms of culture and thus it has lost its strangeness. We need not blame or despise the others though they behave – from our point of view – in a different or even deviant way; they are not crazy or sick or provocative - it is not their fault, it is their culture, which explains their behaviour.

The same is true for attitudes, even values and norms, the system of perceiving the world, “Weltanschauung” and beliefs. Some keywords show the variety of orientations: authority, paradise, happiness, fate, self-realisation, success, fun. With regard to Hofstede (1993) we can distinguish cultures of individualism and collectivism, masculinism or feminism, with different grades of uncertainty avoidance etc.

“Culture” has an explanatory power by which in any “critical situation” tension, rejection, hostility can be reduced or avoided. Cultural understanding can release inter-individual communication from bad feelings and frustration once we realize that it is not because of him/her or me that we do not come together, but because of the fact that we “have” different cultures.

Hence, as soon as we know more about the cultural differences, it even seems possible to avoid “critical incidents” – it is just necessary to take some intercultural training and learn the cultural standards and anticipate which “do’s and don’ts” are crucial, moreover to learn which standards my associates (!) follow. Thus well trained people can interact successfully with culturally different people, e.g. make good business abroad. This is the message professional trainers would like to sell us: Cultural diversity can be managed comfortably. Matter-of-factly things are not that easy. The first mistake is culturalism in a double sense.

Culturalism

“People belong to a culture”, “individuals represent their culture”, “culture can explain why people behave the way they behave”, “in France we can learn French culture”.... This culturalist approach has, no doubt, some advantages. The disadvantages, however, predominate. There are two major problems:

- homogeneity
- collective determination

As soon as, let us say, people in France or from France are told to behave like this or not like that, a strong double claim is made: The territory of France and the people living on this territory build one culture, which is all the same inside the borders, but differs from everything outside.

The explanatory power of “culture” disappears as soon as we understand that individuals can behave this or that way – free to decide within a wide range of options according to particular interests, objectives etc., including the option to leave the particular “cultural setting” (e.g. by migrating to another place).

At least for modern, pluralist societies it is not possible to identify one culture – be it within societal or territorial borders. If you do so, it remains in the best case a brief, abstract display of fundamental values like individualism, liberty, achievement, social responsibility.... which is far from being particular and applicable to a concrete situation. And those cultural features are far from being exclusive in terms of territories or even national states either.

Samuel Huntington delineated huge civilisations which are interacting, competing and even fighting each other (Huntington 1996). It is at least arguable that global politics can be described and predicted in those terms. However, for daily interaction of people this scheme has no explanatory power at all. Cultures cannot act. Only an individual or a group of individuals responsibly act. In a society like the German one, the attitudes and values/norms which underpin individual behaviour are so differentiated, that you can hardly subsume it to any overarching factor. Whenever identity policy is established, only culture in the sense of arts and folklore and tradition can be referred to, but not the values and norms which “rule” individual behaviour.

“Culture” is a term which is not really useful as it is too compact, a catch-all word. On the other hand, people do not act just as they want, in an unstructured or unpredictable way. In order to operationalize “culture” we understand it as a set of rules. To define cultural diversity is a complex task, as a long and maybe never ending discussion about the term “culture” has to be taken into consideration. From an empirical point of view cultural differences have to do with people whose way of life is not the same. It is to be figured out that – pragmatically – cultural differences come about as rules or sets of rules which do not fit together. Interferences of different rules might lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and a sort of difficult situation.

Rules

Rules provide us with simple expectations. We expect people to say “good morning”, to apologize for being late, to complete a task they have agreed upon, to accept a hierarchy.... We can do this because there are (implicit or expressible) rules like “Whenever you meet a person whom you know/enter a social situation of a particular relevance, you greet this person/these persons”; “Whenever you have started a task, you do not quit unless you have good reasons to justify the break”... etc

We like to apply rules as they reduce the complexity of any situation and transform it to one which is defined and brought to order in terms of expectable behaviour and reactions. If all people, who are involved in the situation, share the same rule(s), interaction seems to be easy and without any problem. Rules are the product of frequent interactions and serve to facilitate these interactions.

People do follow rules, according to specific settings, situations, related to their position, etc... Rules are more than pieces of observable behaviour: rules can be violated, of course, but everybody knows that it is an offence. Rules are valid even counterfactually. Of course, rules can change and can be changed.

In order to show the very nature of rules, their wide range, four examples will follow:

- Time: If you have an appointment, you are expected to be at the place on time, i.e. a few minutes earlier. If you have a private invitation, you should not arrive on time, but a couple of minutes later.
- Decision-making: Parents either accept proposals made by their children or argue against them. A longer process of bargaining can take place during which all stakeholders have to present good arguments. Parents might interdict or refuse that bargaining only, if the discussion does not lead to an agreement; in this case the parents can decide in terms of a verdict – but it has to remain an exception.
- Money: In the middle and upper class you can talk about prices and tax saving strategies, but not about salaries and income. You do not lend money to your siblings, friends, neighbours or colleagues. If you do lend, you might be considered naïve. A proverb says: Money stops friendship.
- Justice: You have to work hard and persevere in order to achieve your goals. But don't worry, if you fail, it is bad luck (“it is not my day”), and some day there will be a type of compensation. Those who are just lucky or pretend to be (but do not merit it), cannot become happy.

These rules do concern different aspects of human life, how to perceive, how to behave, how to judge things. They are in force in many countries, but far from being of concern for everybody or being universally valid.

Increasingly people have started to propagate corporate identities, the “culture of an enterprise” or of a university. Institutions tend to introduce sets of rules – and vice

versa one set of rules constitutes an institution. Some rules are clearly formulated (in contracts, by legislation) and do legitimate negative sanctions. Others are informal, conforming more to a “spirit” or to expectations you have to be sensitive for.

Currently, for instance, we can observe a process of changing the academic rules. On one hand educational institutions, namely the universities, are challenged by powerful attempts to impose economical rules, i.e. the rules of market economy on themselves. One subsystem claims to be the model for another one.

At present we are also witnessing political decisions which aim to change the rules of social security. The recent legislation in Germany, copying the British model, seeks to diminish assistance to the unemployed people by offering only basic support (job seeker allowances) for those who have exhausted their resources and show utmost flexibility in order to become employed.

In modern societies there are thousands of rules which might differ. We are experiencing an overwhelming variety of rules, not only “cultural differences” between immigrants and “host” society related to traditions, customs, ethnic origin etc., but a cultural diversity as a complexity of rules and set of rules across societies.

The encounter of Turkish families or African asylum seekers with German “mainstream” people is just a subcase of rule divergence, and probably not the most important one. Maybe the “cultural difference” between immigrants and their target society is minor compared with others. Can one imagine a greater difference between the rules an entrepreneur has to follow and the rules an employee wants to see realized? Is there any sense of community between an old member of the trade unions in the city of Dortmund and a young Neo-Nazi in rural Brandenburg?

Transculturality

As long as people are – within the culturalist approach – supposed to belong to distinct, distinguishable cultures, they can have exchange and learn from each other. Intercultural learning is – due to intercultural competences – highly valued in youth work, higher education, management trainings etc...

We prefer, however, to define culture as an aspect of human actions. If there is a situation in which two persons interact according to different rules, it is an intercultural one. If an encounter of two persons starts with the problem whether they should shake hands or give two or three kisses (which cheek first?), this has to do with different rules of greeting they have learnt. It is a cultural difference, and it can be, but need not be congruent with the countries the protagonists come from (maybe France and Germany).

It is just a situation in which one rule is not the same. Maybe there are even more rules that might differ. But there are, for sure, numerous rules which are in common. If, however, the attention is to be put on the facts of difference in a given situation, it remains an intercultural incident – and the persons involved have to find out how to deal with that.

The term “transcultural” is important and helpful, though the definitions by Welsch (1995) are not precise enough. What is the subject of this adjective? It is easy to see that “trans” has to do with a movement from one point to another (trans-*port*, trans-*lation*) in general. A movement from Europe to the USA, for instance, which is particularly “trans-Atlantic”, indicates just the gap which has been bridged. Hence the term “transcultural” firstly highlights the connection between “cultures”.

Whenever we consider sets of rules (cultures), we know that they are not necessarily restricted to one community or one nation (state), and, even more important, no rule has the same range as another one.

To give evidence for that, we turn back to the four examples in the last paragraph: People in Germany do share the rules of

- a) (Time: If you have an appointment, you are expected to be at the place on time...) with many individuals in North and Central Europe, North America...
- b) (Decision-making: Parents either accept proposals made by their children or argue against....) with lots of upper middle class families in Western-Europe
- c) (Money: You do not lend money to your siblings, friends...) with almost nobody in Mediterranean countries
- d) (Justice: ... if you fail, it is bad luck) with less than half of the people in Germany, because an estimated other half believes in destiny or God’s will.

These comments on the validity of rules have no statistical basis; they are just utilized in order to make clear that any person “belongs” to many different “cultures”.

People may have commonalities with other people with a particular regard (e.g. time economy), but not share with all these people the same belief behind it: some “Calvinists” want to save time because it is a divine gift, whereas Hedonists won’t lose lifetime and life quality.

Children have to learn and develop a sophisticated sensitivity for rules which are in force in the interaction with the parents, but not with the grandparents, at home, but not in school, in their neighbourhood, but not in the city centre, in reality, but not in fiction (TV, Video-Games) etc.

Hence, if person A encounters person B, the situation obliges A and B to apply some rules they have in common, but it will also be the (so-called intercultural) case that some

rules are not commonly shared, and may even contradict each other. The interaction of A and B, insofar, is a link between two sets of rules; the interaction goes somehow across these two sets, it transcends “cultures” (in a traditional definition).

If at the same moment, at the same place, different sets of rules are in power, there is a coexistence between them, maybe even an exchange and transit from one culture to another culture; whenever different rules (for the same regard) are in force in a given situation, it is a transcultural area.

As soon as A adopts or only reflects or even rejects a rule of B (accepts or refuses to act corresponding to this “new” rule), a transcultural process is starting.

We have even introduced the term “transcultural personality” (Berg & Ni Eigartaigh 2010). If a person, likely through intensive mobility (for instance living in exile) has to cope with a “new” set of rules, with strong influence on his/her life, because they represent an attractive way of life or promise lots of advantages or have to be learnt in any case in order to survive etc., then this person undergoes sooner or later a process which has some impact on his/her behaviour and even character. More and more the person alters his/her perception about what is “normal”.

In order to focus on that process and change, the transition from one cultural system to another, the term “transcultural” is more than useful.

Diversity

In order to describe contemporary societies in a productive way, we introduce the concept of cultural diversity and define it as

- the fact that we have learnt rules and seek to apply them properly, yet we have to act in situations in which different rules are in force.
- a promise/programme which allows people to cope with a task better because they can make use of different rules which are applicable in that situation.

Hence diversity is a matter of fact which has to be faced. And at the same time it is a project which can be used to achieve better results. Modern management has already adopted this new concept. Managing diversity is proclaimed as a very systematic and pragmatic strategy to accept and benefit from the fact that “human resources”, employees and by the way, customers do have different capacities, attitudes, approaches which can be used or detected in order to find better solutions. Yet, mostly restricted to creative tasks like problem solving or project development, diversity managers want to make use of the different resources of male and female staff, employees of different national origin, people with different life styles. Cultural diversity is going to be promoted and propagated as an important resource.

The same is true for the political discourse which highlights cultural diversity as a potential which might make life richer.

The popular understanding of cultural diversity has, however, not overcome the culturalist categories. Instead of a “German culture” there are only smaller pieces like the “culture of the German-Turkish” people (as if this is a homogenous, distinct “thing”).

We can imagine a community of human beings who are sharing a restricted number of rules, including also those rules which cope with rule breakers. The rules have to be in a stable order (hierarchy) and shall be cohesive, i.e. not contradict each other. The members of this (small?) community have neither individual needs nor power to fight against one rule. There is no technical development or influence from outside which makes a rule weak or irrelevant or counterproductive...

Such a closed and one-dimensional society might have existed or not. Maybe in some former communities a century or more ago (villages, working class, monastery, far-trading merchants etc) it existed in part.

Actually three factors have come into power and are overwhelmingly important today:

- People live in different relationships/communities and thus different systems of rules
- People are communicating with many other, yet unknown people, be it by media or personal contact (mobility)
- People have learnt a sort of individualism which demands and allows making individual decisions.

Modern societies have – by definition – built out different subsystems like family, economy, education and science, religion, law, art etc. which have established particular rules, including particular values (support, profit, wisdom, heaven, justice, beauty) and currencies (love, money, learning, belief, ...). Postmodern societies have – by definition – got rid of definite distinctions between communities, losing all kinds of certainties in the bargain.

Although it is strenuous to learn diversity, it is fascinating and very reasonable: if other people are different, I am different, too. If diversity is a problem, I myself am part of it.

Matter-of-factly we are living in a world where in any situation people might be involved which do not share the same rule(s) as the majority, or do not define the situation the same way (according to the same rule) as a meaningful minority does.

Just an anecdote: Once I entered a bar (cafeteria) in Berlin and recognized a TV-set in the background showing a formula 1 race. In order to start a conversation with

the barkeeper, I asked him: Schumacher? He answered: Ferrari! It was an Italian bar. The same event (reported on TV) was perceived, described, defined differently – corresponding to the different (in this case national) points of view.

Shortly after a new “tool” like the mobile phone (in Germany called “handy”) came into use, new rules were developed by different agencies: it is a must for peers, it is not allowed when driving a car or in school, it is ridiculous in the concert hall...

Hence, whenever human beings meet, they have got

- a) a provision of rules which are common (and mostly unconscious) – otherwise communication and cooperation would not work so easily.
- b) a certain amount of rules which they do not share, but – as they are not relevant in this situation – do not disturb their communication and cooperation.
- c) a couple of rules which are extremely important in this situation, but differing from the ones other people do have; to “combine” them somehow is crucial in order to achieve the purpose or goal at last of one actor who is involved in this situation.

Category b) is quite interesting as many cases of “tolerance” are subsumed here: Of course I can “tolerate” a Voodoo performance or the church bells/muezzin shouting early in the morning - if I do not live in that area...

But genuine tolerance is something else: It is about a type of behaviour, a sort of value, a particular attitude which I have to bear – as I do not like it, but I have to accept it as a legitimate expression of other people. Tolerance, however, is neither sufficient nor excuses practices against fundamental human rights or key values which I am convinced of.

Case c) indicates also one of the most important practices in intercultural encounters (interference of rules): The actors try to exclude rules or reduce their importance when they might be disturbing. They define the situation as if only a small sector of rules is in relevance, e.g. business, no politics.

Rule bargaining

Education can and must provide the new generation with those competences which are necessary to cope with diversity, to learn how to communicate and cooperate in a complex setting which entails actors who follow different rules.

In a given society individuals and groups might cope with a situation of rule interference by applying strategies of avoidance (tolerance) or of power/dominance. In both cases the parties need not or do not want to change themselves. Of course, there are lots of rules which can be tolerated by others, since they are not directly touched by

them. This is true for the private sphere (kitchen, music, education etc.) as long as public interest or basic values are not concerned.

Insofar it is only “nice” to have lessons in schools which give the children the opportunity to illustrate how their family celebrates a religious festival; but it is crucial for daily life and cooperation to find a way to deal with different “tastes” when a common meal is to be prepared. Costumes are mostly “interesting”, but not any longer if, for instance, the techniques of slaughtering an animal are offensive to religious or ethnic convictions.

Matter-of-factly people do (and must) interact though they follow different rules. In this case they are starting to “bargain” and develop a *modus vivendi*, agreeing on new rules.

In pluralist, open, postmodern societies the rules might be individualized, as even “subcultures” are not homogenous and strictly distinguishable.

Citizenship education, under these auspices, is the planned and systematic endeavour, to facilitate, exercise and strengthen “meta-rules”, which make us capable to cope with diversity (s. for instance Demorgon 1989).

Hence, citizenship education has a double function for teaching diversity:

- To make people familiar with the fact that diversity exists and can be appreciated.
- To enable people to “learn diversity”, i.e. to cope with it, find a *modus vivendi*, create new rules fairly.

Citizenship education

What is the impact of these reflections on educational practice? The educational system has to cope with diversity on different levels and in various aspects. As far as intended and institutionalized learning processes are concerned, the subjects have to reflect diversity, too.

Keywords might be: ambiguity, multi-perspectiveness, comparison and common ground, conflict.

Even natural sciences, which appear to deal with unambiguous matters only, are familiar with ambiguity; physics has to accept that light can be “explained” as waves or particles – it depends on the question.

To give some ideas for teaching history:

- Some history text books choose to refer to manifestations of militarism or colonialism (e.g. Germany, Italy in the late 19th century) as the response of “retarded nations”

- maybe others had been too early? No, only if there is a “natural” law saying when nationalism “is on time”.
- Historical facts like the “foundation of the German Empire” 1870/71 used to be presented in our schools from a national perspective only. What is the view in French textbooks for instance?
 - Celebrating the 200th anniversary of Schiller's death, students can wonder why this German poet is part of the classical heritage, but was also (partly) revered by Nazis and in the GDR as well?
 - Political processes like EU-“enlargement” have been described on behalf of the interests of old member states. What is the impact of this “access” on the new members?
 - It is “une vérité banale”: How things look depends on the point of view.
 - Which rituals can be identified all over the world to mark the end of childhood? What are the similarities of Bar Mikwa, Christian confirmation and “Jugendweihe”?

These few examples show that there is a cognitive dimension of diversity. The educational system has to make sure that the “facts”, teachers are teaching and students are learning, are not “the truth”, but a particular piece of knowledge selected and presented from a particular background (interest).

How to cope with a “variety of truths”? Education has to provide students with skills which enable them to deal, to act, to interact and communicate. A catalogue of intercultural competences has to be elaborated and implemented.

Among the skills that should be included in these catalogues two examples will be illustrated:

- Cultural awareness: The protagonists are able to perceive themselves and other people as persons who act according to their individual and cultural standards.
- Ambiguity tolerance: The protagonists accept or even appreciate the interference of different rules, the complexity of a situation.

We take these skills into consideration, since they oblige people to surpass the routine of daily life, to give up the security of tradition, to question habits. How much ambiguity and uncertainty people can stand is due to socialisation and enculturation, also a question of personal character.

In fact, lots of people react or respond to uncertainty or ambiguity in a negative way, as they fear unmanageable complexity. People usually avoid or fight against these situations or settle for “simple resolutions”. Hostility against “foreigners” is just one option.

Intercultural education has to address people's feelings and values, and well educated and open minded people do appreciate cultural diversity – but it should be more than an intellectual aspiration. Actually, we may soon come to our limits when confronted with

“traditional” or “old fashioned” manners or any other backwardness, not to mention dogmatism or fundamentalism.

How often do we accept other views only because we cannot change them?

Thus education has to achieve two objectives:

- Students should learn to accept and appreciate diversity emotionally.
- Students should learn practically that diversity can be managed.

Beyond knowledge and skills, intercultural education has to influence, strengthen or change values. If diversity is not welcome, trainings or other educational efforts can be counterproductive.

As we know from research about youth exchange, young people mostly enjoy the programs and value intercultural encounters, but the contact alone is not necessarily productive per se: the setting, the activities, the preparation and intervention, also the model given by the responsible team play an important role.

Obviously intercultural education has to do with head (knowledge), hand (skills) and heart (values, attitudes). All three aspects of learning are challenged by cultural diversity.

Finally, on a societal level and for institutions/corporations as well as on the personal level, diversity is an advantage. Organisations and communities, enterprises and groups, individuals can notice that diversity leads to better results. To fulfil a task today is not any more to add one force to others and pull/push all in the same direction, but to combine different forces from different directions (“synergy”).

Synergy

There is some evidence that different approaches to one problem, differing rules about how to manage a situation can lead to better solutions in a technical sense.

When management schools claim the efficiency of an organisation (including all types of enterprises) due to its particular “culture”, proclaim a particular culture of the enterprise, the so-called Corporate Identity, it means: monoculture! Theoretically and empirically the opposite is true: the more diversity an organisation includes, the more diversity it can cope with. Some examples:

- Matter-of-factly people approach tasks in different ways. Some prefer a more structured approach with time schedules, and detailed, clear output; others give preference to communication, creativity and multi-faceted results. To combine output orientation and process-orientation appears to be the best way, at least in different stages of the work, to proceed if not rapidly, at least continuously. At the end, it is

not the good climate or the rigid schedule which makes a team successful, but the combination or equilibrium of both elements.

- The good guy-bad guy-game in detective novels is more than a running gag: a witness or suspect will tell more if the team of detectives utilizes a double approach: friendly and understanding talks as well as rude questioning.
- In so many fields of modern technology problem solving and innovation come from inter-disciplinary approaches. Technology has more than just one facet. Marketing is an effort to understand and respond to the different needs and customs of a heterogeneous audience.

Power

There are good reasons for structures and rules in the class-room in order to enhance the learning process. But to view the class-room as learning opportunity for each child includes the openness for individual learning, in terms of time for instance, but also with regard to the instruments/media. One child prefers to work with visual material, in a deductive way and rapidly, another one needs more time and enjoys an inductive approach with oral guidance...

Usually it is the institutional power, the teacher, who can arrange such a setting. There should be much more opportunities for children to benefit from these arrangements. What an important experience for young people to accept different ways and be accepted individually! What an extraordinary opportunity teachers have got then to facilitate the learning processes by managing diversity!

If youth facilities have to be open for everybody, how can we find a fair arrangement which gives girls, young Kurds, techno-fans and chess-players access to it? In most cases the best solution will be to launch a fair and non-violent debate with deliberation until new rules can be created. Any solution dictated by one interest group, be it the mainstream, be it a minority, will be sub-optimal. The goal is satisfaction and equity. Often enough the administrative staff, with the best of intentions, tries to anticipate conflicts like that by establishing particular "home"-rules or, if a conflict becomes manifest nevertheless, tries to find a solution immediately. The (indirect) message is clear: Diversity disturbs – we should exclude or minimize it; if it is inevitable, than there must be an authority which imposes rules. Again, an important learning opportunity has been missed.

Of course the fair deliberation and creation of new rules does not come about with ease. There are protagonists who exercise power, others who may suffer from that. In educational fields there is no need for bosses who decide instead of the students

or members or visitors, but a need for arbiters who deal in fairness and non-violence. Actually, children practice this type of deliberation and negotiation very often and with engagement, not only for their own interests.

It is, however, necessary to realize that “diversity” can be more than just a difference of opinion or life style, but a dramatic conflict of interests and beliefs. And quite similar to political issues, diversity management can involve obvious or hidden oppression or discrimination of minorities (or majorities by minorities).

Thus the educational concept of diversity and its management has to include a particular awareness. People have to be(come) aware not only of cultural diversity, but also how various actors deal with that diversity, which power relation is underpinned. Diversity must be a promise of equal opportunities and fair play.

Only under these auspices its advantages can be achieved: to cope with a complex situation, to create a good solution for a new problem, to bring together different approaches for a holistic success.

Equal opportunities

It is progress whenever national states acknowledge ethnic and/or linguistic minorities and support preschool education in their mother tongue or organize public services on a bilingual basis. To some extent, at least with regard to language, this has to do with cultural diversity, too.

It is standard now, after a long process, supported by the EU, that all EU-member states have elaborated broad legislation against any kind of discrimination. No one is to be discriminated against due to his age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, physical status.

But, whenever people act and interact, there are not necessarily differences because of the ethnical background or age/gender. It might depend on the situation and type of interaction. The rules of fairness or solidarity, for instance, people might share even if they differ in terms of age or physical status. Whether people understand a problem as a challenge and to what extent they want to avoid uncertainty..., whether they like to save money or spend, even waste it... - those attitudes may somehow be related to age, mother tongue, sexual orientation or gender, but need not necessarily.

There are women and men who are sure that they differ in terms of feeling, thinking and behaving, and these differences might be relevant in many situations. There might be, however, also situations in which those differences are not important at all; those differences might be(come) small with regard to age or religion or other “cultural

aspects”.

Often enough there is a confusion between the category or groups people are supposed to belong to and their “real” behaviour. Sometimes it might be called “typical” – which includes the evidence for the opposite. Collective identity, the belonging to a category of people, is a process of self-identification and/or the result of an attribution by (meaningful, sometimes powerful) others. Any member of the group or category (collective) can expect that all activities and actions, performed by another member, will be counted as something all members have performed, be it good or bad. All these attributions draw a picture which used to be called (auto- or hetero-) stereotype.

Until the 1990s, the fact of immigration had not been acknowledged by the major part of the political elites; also parts of the immigrants themselves have deemed their “sojourn” in Germany to last just a particular period of time; they have wanted to keep the option to “return home”. Today “integration” is dominating the political discourse among the political elites in Germany (and other countries).

Because immigrants whose forefathers had moved from German countries to the Tsarist Empire some centuries ago, are Germans by legal definition, also because immigrants can become German citizens by various means (e.g. marriage with a German citizen), the societal discourse in Germany refers to people “with migration background”, no longer to foreigners or non-nationals. Those persons with “migration background” are, according to polls, about 19 % of German society, in the age group below 20 years about 30 %.

Again, the culturalist paradigm works if people with migration background are - in daily and public, professional and scientific discourses – treated as one group in distinction to the native population.

Beside the fact (by definition) that these persons or at least one parent has been born outside Germany, the communalities are scarce, however.

If, for instance, the parents who have been socialised or educated in Kazakhstan or Turkey or Iraq will have a tendency to raise their children as they were raised, the cultural “backgrounds” of these children are pretty diverse.

Background is a context, not a script. Each person is more than just the product of his/her country of origin. It should be easy, for instance, to imagine a person in exile who has left her/his country just because s/he no longer felt comfortable with the (political) “culture” there. Migration should be viewed as a process an individual is working on, from initial impulse to move and continuing even after the arrival in their new “world”.

In European countries (young) people with migration background appear to be

underprivileged, not to have the same access to (formal) education like their peers. Compared by age group, fewer children with migration background achieve higher education, e.g. complete vocational training or acquire a university degree.

The first explanation points to the fact that these children have had fewer opportunities as they entered the educational system later. Secondly, however, this educational system has not been prepared to support these children sufficiently to compensate their “backwardness”.

Schools are not “multicultural”, but display the mainstream culture and thus “challenge” cultural minorities, if not put them at a disadvantage.

Usually this societal fact is, however, attributed to individuals and groups: Those children who have not been socialised in the domestic educational system from the very beginning (e.g. Kindergarten), whose parents do not have the same “culture”, for instance techniques, skills or attitudes and values (ambitions!), are said to not perform well or have to work harder to succeed.

This type of argument is hardly new. It used to work also for native born children from the working class (who are extremely underrepresented in German Universities). It is them who have to cope with the challenge to adjust and assimilate, i.e. overcome their “social handicap”.

Interestingly, there are growing numbers of migration children who are doing better scholastically than their native born peers. In the US the “Asians” are getting awarded as the best graduates at almost every highschool. In the German state of Brandenburg Vietnamese children have achieved the top positions in the final examination before university entrance. This is not because they attend a better or “multicultural school”, but due to their ambition and family support. Furthermore, these children preserve their “culture”, as far as food or religious beliefs are concerned. The strong family ties are not only cultural traditions, but explain to some extent their success in schools.

Transcultural processes

People from the extreme right wing or neo-Nazis rarely speak in terms of culture which appears to be a modern or even postmodern term and cannot be as easily handled as “peoples”, “nations” or “races”. Racism is claiming hierarchies, it is determining higher and lower ranks of people; but cultures can be diverse and equal at the same time. Even German nationalists have to admit that pizza, kebab, Peking-duck and sushi do enrich their kitchen.

Beside food and beverages people can enjoy folk dances and music as part of different

cultures. The multicultural class-room cannot be ignored any longer. Most curricula/ teachers give children the opportunity to present their traditional celebrations like Bayram, Ramadan etc.

Altogether a culture of recognition seems to be established: people know and accept that there is a remarkable number of citizens who live in different traditions.

Actually this type of multiculturalism is selective, superficial, and restricted. Culture is reduced to folklore. For the mainstream it is fun to watch people in their “traditional outfit” or to taste (!) their food. But nevertheless, these people have “to integrate”. The mainstream is understanding “integration” as a learning process which has only one side, the immigrants have to undergo it.

Still to often multiculturalism in schools counts in terms of cultures. Children are recognised as representatives of their culture, only. The country of origin is claimed to determine what culture they represent, as if – unlike Germany! – all people from abroad or from one country share the same religious beliefs or practice the same rituals on the same holidays.

Concerning values and norms, cultural diversity cannot be observed or visited as a show – in real situations people have to communicate and interact. Of course, there cannot be any cultural relativism with regard to physical violence, psychical oppression, inequality etc...

But it is daily work for everybody to cope with situations in which the actors have common as well as different rules. This transcultural reality can result from all types of mobility and migration, from globalisation, the media etc. This transcultural reality, promoted in postmodern societies, but not restricted to them, is a reality everybody has to cope with. It is better not only to bear it, but to take benefit from cultural diversity.

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