

Teaching Interculturality 'Otherwise'

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Chapter 3

Unity in diversity

Exploring intercultural teaching and learning
practices in secondary education and teacher
training in Austria

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3 Unity in diversity

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Introduction

Processes of globalisation and international migration “have resulted in an opening up of new spaces and resources for identity construction and negotiation” (Baker, 2015: 239). Hence, contemporary societies are characterised by a growing scope of linguistic and cultural diversity and life designs have become highly heterogeneous and fluid. Describing society as a “network of perspectives” (Risager, 2012: 106), Risager (2018: 25) also argues that “culture, society and the world, and also the classroom itself, are seen as a multitude of individual and group perspectives and identities”. As they constitute direct mirrors of society (BMB, 2017), classrooms at a global day and age demonstrate an increasingly multilingual and multicultural student population. This development can, for instance, be observed in the educational context of Austria, a country located in central Europe. Over the past ten years, the share of learners with another L1 than German, the official language of instruction for the major part of Austria, has increased by 60%, so that the proportion of students using a different language than German at home amounted to 29.3% in lower secondary education in the school year of 2020/2021 (Statistik Austria, 2021a). Reporting on linguistic diversity, these numbers can be indicative of the presumed cultural diversity present inside Austrian classrooms today. But how can culture and interculturality be conceptualised? How can intercultural teaching and learning be implemented in education?

My empirical study on Indigenous perspectives in Australian education (Peskoller, 2021) and my research on the implementation of intercultural learning in Austrian EFL (English as a foreign language) classrooms (e.g. Peskoller, 2022) have shaped my understanding of culture and interculturality. Moreover, my approach towards these two concepts was influenced by my experience as an EFL/mathematics teacher and teacher trainer as well as by two years of educational work with refugee students from over ten different countries. This contribution thus starts with a delineation of my understanding of culture and interculturality. I then proceed to conceptualise the classroom as a meaningful meeting place and fruitful starting point for intercultural learning before discussing selected policy documents informing the Austrian educational context. Adopting a practical lens, I present my ideas and experience in connection with teaching (about) interculturality

looking both at secondary education and (language) teacher training and discuss related objectives, approaches, and challenges. I conclude by summarising core concerns and outlining directions for future discussions.

Culture and interculturality

Fundamentally, scholars such as Volkmann (2010) have highlighted a persistent lack of clarity in connection with the concept of culture, while Brunsmeier (2016) pronounced the field of interculturality in education a *conceptual jungle*. In light of these impediments, I regard it essential for anyone working in the field of interculturality to outline their underlying understanding and conceptualisation of the used constructs. Hence, this chapter aims at meeting this requirement.

A university lecturer on Indigenous Australian perspectives used the term “ways of knowing, being, and doing” (Power et al., 2015: 441) to refer to the complex construct of culture. Consistent with common conceptualisations and proposed models for intercultural competence, this expression reflects the concept’s tripartite nature consisting of cognitive, affective, and action-oriented dimensions. Based on this foundation, I understand culture as a highly individual, dynamic, and transnational construct, and support a late modernist and Cultural Studies, hence non-essentialist, view in my work as a teacher, language teacher educator, and researcher. Specifically, I believe that culture encompasses aspects such as “individual emotions, memories, habits of thought and behaviours” (Kramsch, 2009: 235) rendering every person “unique in his or her experience-based, socially influenced perspective” (Risager, 2012: 106). Considering Risager’s (2018; 2012) work on *linguaculture*, culture has transcended national borders and has become a dynamic, hybrid, and intersecting construct (Blell & Doff, 2014; Kramsch, 2009). At a global day and age, nationality has become one among numerous other dimensions such as class, gender, language, religion, or sexuality that can play a part in identity construction (Svarstad, 2021; Baker, 2015). This approach has rendered the former notion of one country equating one culture obsolete and problematised the essentialist view of culture as a means to explain people’s practices, products, or values (Risager, 2018). Contrary to fixed affiliations, culture “is constructed and shaped minute by minute by speakers and hearers in their daily verbal and non-verbal transactions” (Kramsch, 2009: 234) through “processes of identification of self and Other” (Risager, 2018: 130). Therefore, Ferri (2018: 27) comprehensibly identifies individuals as “dialogic entities constantly evolving through interaction”. This reality again emphasises the dynamic nature of culture as being shaped, contested, and redefined through encounters (Risager, 2018). In this regard, Byram (1997: 40) highlights that it is not language or culture systems but individuals that meet, negotiate meaning, and “bring to the situation their own identities and cultures” (Byram, 2021: 51). Hence, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013: 21) summarise:

Cultures are therefore dynamic and emergent – they are created through the actions of individuals and in particular through the ways in which they use

language. This means that meanings are not simply shared, coherent constructions about experience but rather can be fragmented, contradictory, and contested within the practices of a social group because they are constituted in moments of interaction. Culture in such a view is not a coherent whole but a situated process of dealing with the problems of social life. Cultures thus are open to elements that are diverse and contradictory, and different interpretations may be made of the same events by individuals who may be considered to be from the same culture.

Based on such an open, dynamic, and highly individualised understanding of culture, I subsequently regard interculturality as the multitude of dimensions in which human beings can show commonalities and differences and which (can) play a role for (successful) interaction and collaboration. Among others, these may include individuals' experiences and stories, opinions and viewpoints, life designs, values, or approaches. Specifically, I support Svarstad (2021) in regarding interculturality an "active engagement with diversity" (41) as well as a non-essentialist umbrella concept encompassing discourses on identity, subjectivity, inclusion, and various forms of intercultural encounters in different domains (Risager & Svarstad, 2020; Lütge, 2019). Similarly, Dervin and Jacobsson (2021: 16) understand interculturality as a critical framework "to analyse how discourses of culture are activated by different people in different contexts and for different purposes".

Fundamentally, interlocutors will never exhibit commonalities *only* but will share more or less similarities with their counterparts in an interaction. Hence, the latter can be understood to take place on a continuum ranging from many to few (perceived) commonalities between individuals, with most of them remaining undetected during conversations or playing an insignificant role for the successful outcome. Thus, in essence, every encounter constitutes an intercultural encounter.

In the German-speaking research context, some scholars have adopted the concept of *transculturality* to counter an all too rigid understanding of culture, which the intercultural discourse was frequently accused of. Despite the received criticism of the prefix, I use the terms *intercultural* and *interculturality* in my elaborations, as encounters always take place *between* individuals. Concurrently, my work and understanding is based on an open, postmodernist view of culture and identity as outlined in this chapter.

Finally, I discuss the idea of *interculturalising interculturality* as proposed by Dervin and Jacobsson (2022) and supported by the editors of this volume, and derive implications for teaching and research practice. To me, the term signifies a *practise what you preach* for anyone involved in the field of interculturality. Interculturalising interculturality means entering a dialogue to reflect, rethink, and revise our conceptualisations and understandings of interculturality. The integration of different perspectives and voices does justice to the dynamic nature of the field and can promote progress. Overall, critically rethinking, reshaping, redefining, reassessing, and reviewing multiperspectivity constitutes an intercultural process that should present a standard course of action in any academic

discipline or educational context. In the upcoming chapter, I proceed to discuss the intercultural nature of classrooms and any (learning) group.

Classrooms as intercultural meeting places

Looking more closely at educational realities, Australian educator Lo Bianco (2009: 113) manifests that the “strongest indicator of the transformed realities of contemporary education in a globalised world is the depth of cultural, racial and linguistic diversity in schools”. Relating to this development, I also want to share one of Gorski’s (2016: 222) statements: “All students are culturally and linguistically diverse relative to one another: No student is culturally and linguistically diverse on her or his own without being compared to somebody else.” Thus, Grünewald et al. (2011) designate classrooms as ideal places to explore different voices and stories, relativise personal viewpoints and experiences, and build empathy. With Rogge (2014) speaking of an elusive complexity of potential encounters and conversations among learners, the (language) classroom becomes a *hybrid space* (Hallet, 2002) in which students are intercultural agents as they negotiate meanings, values, and perspectives (Freitag-Hild, 2018).

Based on my view of interculturality, I thus regard classrooms as intercultural meeting places that provide meaningful starting points to be harnessed for intercultural learning. This notion also becomes apparent in fundamental educational policy documents relevant for the Austrian context, which I investigate in the next section.

The intercultural educational context of Austria

Located in the centre of Europe with a population of 8.8 million (Statistik Austria, 2021b), “Austria has a long tradition as a country of immigration and emigration” (Hintermann et al., 2014: 80). Since 2010, people from almost all countries of the world have been living in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, which has led to a strong increase of linguistic, cultural, and social heterogeneity (Gogolin, 2016: 61). In 2021, 25.4% of Austria’s inhabitants indicated to have a background of migration predominantly associated with former Yugoslavian countries or Turkey. The respective value amounted to 18.8% in 2011 implying a growth of nearly 7 percentage points in 10 years (Statistik Austria, 2021a, 2021b).

Looking into Austrian schools, one can observe an increasing share of learners with other first languages than German. Juxtaposing data from the school years of 2009/10 and 2019/20, the overall proportion of students predominantly using a different language than the language of instruction increased by almost 10 percentage points from 17.8% to 27.0% (Statistik Austria, 2021c: 45). Specifically, in the school year of 2020/21, 29.3% of learners in lower secondary education indicated to have a different first language than German (Statistik Austria, 2021a). Specific data on the language varieties predominantly used by learners in Austria is only available for elementary levels: the most frequent first languages among four- to five-year-olds in Austria in 2021 were Turkish, Bosnian/Croatian/

Serbian, Rumanian, and Arabic (Statistik Austria, 2021b: 47). Aside from German as the official language, six recognised autochthonous minorities hold special rights to secure language and culture preservation in determined regions of Austria. For instance, there are bilingual primary schools and secondary schools that use Hungarian, Slovenian, or Croatian as additional languages of instruction (Bundeskanzleramt, 2022).

The national school curriculum for secondary education as well as the fundamental decree on intercultural education constitute two policy documents that inform contemporary education in Austria and directly address intercultural matters. Particularly, intercultural learning has featured as the second of ten fundamental, interdisciplinary teaching principles in the Austrian curriculum for secondary education since 1992. According to the document, the construct encompasses comprehending, experiencing, and actively co-creating cultural values through learning together. Thereby, fostering in-class cohesion, inviting an open and respectful discussion on different viewpoints, and investigating cultural backgrounds in an equality-driven approach are central (BMBWF, 2022: 12–13). In addition, the third teaching principle in the curriculum, multilingualism, also shows references to intercultural matters. Specifically, this section emphasises the importance of language(s) in a world characterised by increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. Furthermore, it identifies linguistic sensitivity and intercultural understanding as the basis of a democratic society. Lastly, the fourth interdisciplinary teaching principle, diversity and inclusion, also outlines the relevance of a constructive handling of the increasing plurality among learners through fostering individual skills and potentials independent from affiliations. The necessity to create non-discriminatory spaces for learning and development for children from ‘different backgrounds’ is also emphasised (BMBWF, 2022: 13–14). Moreover, the syllabus highlights the special role of foreign language education (FLE) in connection with intercultural learning as these subjects contribute to the familiarisation with and deliberate perception of foreign or unknown dimensions. As stated in the policy document, students can develop a deeper understanding of the diversity of life designs as well as an increased sensitivity for cultural commonalities and differences through addressing intercultural topics, discussing related questions, and reflecting on their personal experiences (BMBWF, 2022: 55–56).

In order to increase the implementation of intercultural learning in classroom practice and to enhance educators’ conceptual understanding, the Austrian ministry of education released a fundamental decree on intercultural education in 2017 (BMB, 2017). The document delineates cultural diversity inside classrooms as an enrichment for learning and is based on an open understanding of culture as well as a dynamic concept of identity. Connecting to learners’ diverse biographies, lives, and experiences, intercultural education contributes to a learning atmosphere grounded in appreciation and respect. From a practical perspective, the decree commends educators to encourage their students to question stereotypes, prejudice, and ethnocentricity as well as identify and react to excluding, racist, or sexist statements and actions. Through activities such as reflection,

critical analysis, and perspective changing, learners' empathy, openness, respect, and tolerance for ambiguity can be fostered (BMB, 2017).

In spite of this foundation, the large-scale Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS) indicated only 13.6% of teachers in Austrian lower secondary education felt (well-)prepared to work in a multicultural classroom setting in 2018. In addition, approximately 49% of the surveyed educators identified the adjustment of their methodological approaches to the needs of the culturally diverse student population as a daily challenge (Schmich & Itzlinger-Bruneforth, 2019).

Based on these insights into the Austrian educational context, I discuss intercultural education in connection with objectives, approaches, and challenges I believe to be central to the discourse henceforth.

Implementing intercultural education in teaching practice

With linguistic and cultural diversity constituting characteristics of societies and classrooms in a global day and age, the “multicultural world has made intercultural teaching necessary” (Sobkowiak, 2016: 697). In my elaborations, I make use of the term *intercultural education* to refer to processes of intercultural teaching and learning. I favour these expressions over *teaching (about) interculturality* as the latter suggests a rather external, observing position regarding interculturality exclusively as a topic or content matter. On the contrary, it is vital to integrate the methodological dimension of intercultural education and regard teachers and learners as contributors to the interculturality of the classroom setting. Also, teaching and learning should not be discussed in isolation, as these processes are inherently connected.

Hence, this chapter sheds light on objectives, approaches, and challenges in connection with the implementation of intercultural education focusing on secondary education and (language) teacher training in Austria.

Objectives of intercultural education

Broadly speaking, intercultural education should contribute to countering discrimination, exclusion, and racism (Fäcke, 2019; BMB, 2017) by regarding diversity as an enrichment that can provide new possibilities (Bär, 2017). In particular, a core objective of intercultural teaching and learning lies in the development of learners' awareness of “different sociocultural perspectives and identities and their implications for intercultural communication and understanding, empathy and collaboration” (Risager, 2018: 25). In this regard, the construct of intercultural competence emerged, which Liddicoat and Scarino (2013: 24) define as “being aware that cultures are relative [...] that there is no one ‘normal’ way of doing things, but that all behaviors are culturally variable”. Conceptualised in a transnational and global frame, intercultural competence thus assists learners to “navigate in a world characterised by cultural flows mainly caused by transnational migrations, and representations of the moving world” (Risager, 2009: 29). Hence, the construct is closely connected with the global and intercultural

citizenship discourse aiming to prepare learners for participation in a multilingual and multicultural society (Hammer, 2012; Byram, 2008).

In this regard, I want to refer to two frameworks that provide a useful overview of core aims and concerns in the discourse of interculturality. To start, the OECD (2018) published a model for the multidimensional construct of *global competence* strongly connected with the sustainable development goals (United Nations, 2019). The model entails dimensions such as the analysis of local, global, and intercultural challenges, understanding and appreciating various viewpoints and worldviews, participating in open, adequate, and effective interactions, and includes attitudes such as openness, respect for people with different backgrounds, appreciation of diversity, and a willingness to act (OECD, 2018: 9–18). Similarly, connecting the discourses of global and intercultural citizenship education, the *Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018) constitutes another interdisciplinary model that I regard both relevant and useful. The framework demonstrates cognitive, action-oriented, and two affective dimensions of values and attitudes, and outlines the “competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies” (Council of Europe, 2018: 11). Among others, these include open-mindedness, awareness of diversity, respect for otherness, reflectivity, empathy, critical approach as well as a willingness to act (Council of Europe, 2018: 38).

While Fäcke (2019) argues that all facets of interculturality shape FLE, I now proceed to investigate selected intercultural aims in foreign language education. Sercu (2000: 389) highlights that FLE should promote “learners’ acquisition of the attitudes and skills required for interacting with people from differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds”. While Byram (2021: 29) proposes that FLE “should have an impact on how learners see their own culture, that they should be able to critique it and view it differently”. In this context, intercultural communicative competence is still regarded a key dimension in FLE (Schumann, 2019a) and learners should be supported in becoming critical intercultural speakers (Martinez, 2019; Byram, 1997). Through an awareness of the existence of the “multiple, ambivalent, resourceful, and elastic nature of cultural identities in an intercultural encounter” (Guilherme, 2002: 125), critical intercultural speakers problematise identities and concepts connected with essentialism, nationalism or ethnicity and are aware that “the development of identities involves a constant negotiation” (Risager, 2018: 133).

As expressed by the two preceding models, in educational policy documents, as well as in the work of various authors in the field, fostering learners’ open-mindedness, empathy, and respect for diversity as well as strengthening their reflective capabilities and willingness to act constitute central objectives in intercultural education integrating cognitive, affective, and action-oriented dimensions. While these constructs are polysemous and require precise definitions, what remains undeniable is the need for educators to continuously strive to develop and strengthen these competences themselves in order to promote the respective dimensions

in their learners. Moreover, teachers ought to be self-critical and reflective towards their own views and approaches and need to be familiarised with strategies to harness the existing diversity in their classrooms as a vital resource and starting point for intercultural learning.

Having outlined key objectives in connection with intercultural education, a main question for pre- and in-service teachers concerns the implementation of the concept in teaching practice, which I address in the upcoming section.

Approaches to intercultural education

As indicated before, I believe interculturality needs to be viewed both from a methodological perspective and a potential teaching and learning content. After discussing these two dimensions and presenting a criteria catalogue for intercultural education (Peskoller, 2022) that can assist teachers with its educational implementation, the section concludes with two practical examples from my material fund.

From a methodological viewpoint, intercultural education follows the principles of multiperspectivity, dialogue, and reflection (Freitag-Hild, 2018: 168) while integrating the dimensions of subjectivity, process orientation, and interaction (Schumann, 2009: 214–215). I believe that intercultural education fundamentally emanates from the existing diversity inside classrooms and support Kramsch's proposal to thematise and openly discuss learners' "culturally diverse representations, interpretations, expectations, memories, and identifications" in class (2009: 236). Moreover, scholars have identified awareness-building, perception training, analysing and comparing, interpreting, and role-play as core methodological building blocks of an intercultural pedagogy (Schumann, 2019a, 2009; Freitag-Hild, 2018; Blell & Doff, 2014). Specifically, the added value of working with different types of literature such as post-colonial writings and works of fiction has frequently been emphasised (e.g. Matos & Melo-Pfeifer, 2020; Lütge, 2018) and was designated an intensively researched dimension in intercultural pedagogy (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2019). Developing Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013: 60) interacting processes of intercultural learning with its four stages of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting further, Risager and Svarstad's (2020: 49) cycle model includes specifications for the individual dimensions and proposals for their implementation, "knowledge and critical cultural awareness" (Risager & Svarstad, 2020: 49) at the centre of their model. Connecting to Byram's (1997, 2021) model of intercultural communicative competence, the authors position.

Based on a literature review combining theoretical-conceptual work, previous empirical research, and relevant educational policy documents for the Austrian context, a criteria catalogue for intercultural learning (Peskoller, 2022) emerged using Freitag-Hild's (2018) seven-dimensional typology for intercultural tasks in language education as a framework. While the catalogue itself needs to be critically reflected and reviewed, it can provide stimuli and

Table 3.1 Criteria catalogue for intercultural learning activities

Warming up

Are learners' previous knowledge included?
 Are learners' cultural experiences included?

Self-reflection

Are learners encouraged to analyse their personality or personal life stories?
 Are learners encouraged to express and share their opinions, perspectives, or personal experiences?
 Are learners encouraged to reflect on their opinions, perspectives, or personal experiences?

Interpretation and change of perspective

Are learners encouraged to empathise with other points of view and relativise their own cultural viewpoints?
 Are learners encouraged to change, discuss, or coordinate different perspectives?
 Are learners encouraged to relate new aspects or topics to familiar ones?
 Are learners encouraged to interpret visual and verbal cultural representations?

Analysis and reflection

Are learners encouraged to explore cultural dimensions or collect culture-related information?
 Are learners encouraged to compare cultural dimensions by stating commonalities and differences?
 Are learners encouraged to reflect on differences?
 Are learners encouraged to analyse or reflect on racism, prejudice, or stereotypes?
 Are learners encouraged to analyse or reflect on critical incidents or identify causes for misunderstandings in interaction?

Negotiation and participation

Are learners encouraged to hold a discussion?
 Are learners encouraged to do a roleplay?
 Are encounters with another culture addressed?

Contextualisation

Is a personal relation established by connecting to learners' interests or *Lebenswelt*?
 Are learners encouraged to recognise or explore the diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, or experiences in the classroom?
 Are learners encouraged to identify ethnocentric perspectives in their own or other contexts?

(Meta-)Reflection

Are learners encouraged to reflect on their intercultural learning process?

Source: Peskoller, 2022.

guidance for educators to assist in implementing different dimensions of intercultural education (see Table 3.1). The criteria can not all be easily realised in a single activity, but they can be combined in various ways to ensure that different dimensions are regularly integrated in classrooms discourse. Though the items emerged from a comprehensive literature review, integrate various perspectives, and were revised multiple times on the basis of research talks, culture and interculturality are more complex than can ever be mapped by checklists. Thus,

the categories naturally still reflect my subjective understanding of the constructs (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

Aside from the methodological dimension, interculturality also needs to be made explicit in education. For teaching about intercultural content matters, authors (e.g. Schumann, 2009) have listed aspects such as rituals, symbols, self-images, perceptions of others, migration, transcultural identities, culture contact, and culture conflict. Others have suggested working with and reflecting on (virtual) encounters and critical incidents (Heringer, 2019; Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2015). Furthermore, Svarstad (2021: 50) proposes dealing with current topics and political debates such as the #MeToo or the Black Lives Matter movement, climate change, Indigenous peoples, terrorism, or gay pride.

Furthermore, contemplating questions of intersectionality and multiperspectivity (Dervin, 2016: 83), the topics of equality, diversity, discrimination, justice, stereotypes, prejudice, and racism need to feature as the contents of education. While all these topics and ideas are valuable and can be harnessed for intercultural education, I want to note the inherent danger of essentialising, which I will turn to in an upcoming section.

For implementing intercultural education, different types of media such as texts, images, or videos can be didacticised (see Table 3.1) and used as facilitators. In this regard, three print resources have particularly fascinated me in my practice both at school and university. Firstly, the (German) reflection cards on diversity, anti-discrimination, and anti-racism by Mengis and Drücker (2019) provide stimuli for discussions and reflections on the basis of factual statements and the description of thought-provoking situations. Secondly, the collection of self-reflection activities provided in *Allyship in Action* (Sauseng et al., 2020) include inspiring ideas to promote a critical analysis, reflection, and discussion in class. Finally, the resource *Let's Talk* (Teaching Tolerance, 2019) contains detailed and staged instructions to facilitate critical conversations among learners and create the necessary foundations for an adequate and respectful learning environment.

To conclude this section, I provide two practical examples from my own material collection to demonstrate how I endeavour to implement intercultural teaching and learning both at methodological and content level. I illustrate my approach by explicitly working with stereotypes in the EFL classroom using slightly adapted extracts from a city guide to Innsbruck, Austria (InfoEck, 2018), in the first example and a video clip (Tanaka, 2013) in the second. In Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2, I outline how these and other resources can be harnessed as starting points for intercultural learning processes encouraging fruitful discussions, analyses, and reflections.

While the material can naturally be used in a variety of ways, the designed activities strive to integrate different dimensions of intercultural learning as demonstrated in Table 3.1. More precisely, learners are encouraged to critically analyse and interpret the document “Act like a local” (InfoEck, 2018) by exploring their own and others’ practices, reflecting on their experiences, changing perspectives, and relativising their personal viewpoints. After the activity, I often invite learners to share their findings and ideas in plenum and initiate an open discussion

City guide to Innsbruck: “Act like a local”

Read the extracts from a city guide to Innsbruck and discuss three of the following bullet points with a partner:

- What do you think is the aim of this section of the map? Who is meant by *we*?
- Who would want to *act like a local* and why?
- Would you argue that the information is useful? Why (not)?
- Which of these aspects are true for you? Would you argue that this information holds true for all people living in Innsbruck? Why (not)?
- If you had to write a brochure on the city you are living in, how would you go about it? What would you (not) include and why?
- What might be problematic about these extracts from the city guide?

ACT LIKE A LOCAL

<p>WE EAT A LOT</p> <p>If you go to a restaurant, be careful how much you order. We do love to eat and normally serve good portions of sumptuous food. Sometimes the soup is already enough for an entire meal. Also be careful with dessert – a Kaiserschmarrn is totally worth trying, but you should still be hungry when ordering it.</p>	<p>SAY HELLO!</p> <p>At an altitude of about 900m, we drop the anonymity of the city and surprisingly start greeting everyone we meet. When hiking, don't be shy and say: “Griass di” (sing.), “Griass eich (plur.) or “Servas”.</p>	<p>FIND A LOCAL</p> <p>You can recognise locals quite easily, as they're the people who don't take photos of the mountains and the Old Town. Actually, during summer days or the Christmas Market you won't find them in the Old Town anyway. It's just too packed with tourists. This map will give you new perspectives and holds secret insider tips for exploring our wonderful city.</p>
<p>PLAY CARDS</p> <p>We learned playing the card game “Watten” from our grandpas, still play it with our friends and will one day teach it to our grandchildren. It involves cards called “Ober” and “Unter”, colours like leaves and acorns and a lot of swearing.</p>	<p>WEAR SHOES</p> <p>There seems to be some kind of myth in other countries that you can climb a mountain shoesless or in flip-flops. Our mountains are powerful. They are steeper and the rocks are harder than in most other places. You can definitely not climb them in flip-flops. It's not safe at all, so please don't do it!</p>	<p>ALWAYS READY TO SKI</p> <p>We love to go skiing and snowboarding. You can always see us carrying around our equipment – at university, on the bus and in the streets. This is especially entertaining during spring. Watch out for locals in sneakers on their bike with skis on the way up the mountain.</p>
<p>YOU ARE NOT IN GERMANY</p> <p>Even though we definitely speak German, we are proud to be Austrian. Some places are packed with Germans, so it can seem like you are in Germany – but you are not. Please don't mistake us for Germans – we will be really offended.</p>	<p>ODER?</p> <p>We like to end sentences with “oder”, oder? It's similar to the English “right”. We don't expect to get an answer. It's just a bridge to our next sentence, oder?</p>	<p>INNSIDER*</p> <p>We are constantly talking about the water level of the Inn river. We notice things like: “Oh, look how high it is!” when the snow is melting in spring and: “Wow, the Inn got brown! And what is floating over there?” after heavy rains. *puns with “Inn” are very popular.</p>
	<p>IDENTIFY THE MOUNTAINS</p> <p>You will blend in perfectly if you can identify the surrounding mountains. Knowing where the Nordkette (mountain range to the north) is really helps with orientation.</p>	

Figure 3.1 Addressing stereotypes in the EFL classroom – example 1

on all six bullet points. Also, learners can be asked about the reasons for their choice of bullet points as well as their approach to the selection process.

Alternatively, I often approach the topic of stereotypes in my EFL classrooms using audiovisual material like YouTube clips. Figure 3.2 thus demonstrates the integration of different facets of intercultural learning using the resource “What kind of Asian are you?” (Tanaka, 2013). The video shows an encounter between two runners in the countryside leading to a short conversation in English.

The proposed questions accompanying this video clip require learners to decidedly change and coordinate perspectives to interpret the individuals' feelings and behavioural patterns. Moreover, students are encouraged to critically analyse the conversation individually before they share and reflect their viewpoints with a partner mapping similarities and differences.

Overall, when teaching *about* interculturality teachers ought to embed different topics in a methodological framework that encourages a critical analysis,

Video clip: “What kind of Asian are you?”

1. Skim the questions below. Then, watch the video clip and take notes on the given questions.

2. After a second round of watching, add further aspects and ideas.

- How do the two people feel at the beginning/middle/end of the scene?

- What do you think were the man’s aims in this scene? Would you argue that he was successful? Why (not)?

- Identify some examples of stereotypes and prejudice expressed in the dialogue. What makes them problematic?

- What strategies can you detect regarding countering stereotypes and prejudice? Would you argue that the strategies were effective? Why (not)?

- Put yourself in the woman’s shoes: How would you have reacted in this situation? Would you have behaved differently? If yes, explain why and how.

3. Exchange your answers and viewpoints with a partner. Find out which aspects you do (not) agree on and discuss why.

Figure 3.2 Addressing stereotypes in the EFL classroom – example 2

reflection, and discussion. I believe that the methodological dimension of interculturality particularly needs to be strengthened so that stereotyping, othering, or an essentialist understanding of culture and identity are not (unintentionally) expressed and solidified, but actively deconstructed. This alludes to the different impediments in the discourse of interculturality, which is the focus of the next section.

Challenges in intercultural education

Building on the previous sections, I now discuss selected challenges that I regard central to the discourse on interculturality and intercultural education. As before, these elaborations derive from my personal viewpoint and experience as a teacher, teacher educator, and researcher in language education.

To me, the greatest obstacle at the interface of interculturality and classroom practice constitutes essentialist and nationalist conceptions of culture and identity and actions based thereon. This entails educators’ understanding of culture

as a static, separable, and homogeneous entity, attributing it a descriptive and explanatory role, and conceptualising it through shared norms, values, products, and practices (Risager, 2018). Holliday (2010: 4) clarifies that essentialism “presents people’s individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are”. This issue is frequently connected with a focus on nationalities and the conviction of one country equating one culture, often termed the *national paradigm* (Risager, 2021, 2018; Grünewald, 2012; Kramersch, 2009). On the contrary, as previously outlined, seeing culture as a highly dynamic, hybrid, and fluid entity, the “national community is only one of the many cultures an individual participates in” (Kramersch, 2009: 235). Against the backdrop of the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in societies and classrooms, essentialist and nationalist approaches need to be problematised and contested (Blell & Doff, 2014; Kramersch, 2009).

While Holmes and Dervin (2016: 6) argue that the “over-emphasis on ‘cultural difference’ and (national?) ‘culture’ in the ‘intercultural’ [...] is increasingly becoming a thing of the past”, I still observe these tendencies among in- and pre-service teachers. For instance, I frequently notice educators treating non-German L1 learners as experts for a specific country without inquiring about the relevance of this country for their lives and perhaps being unaware of the fact that learners may have never been to their relatives’ country of origin. This could be a testimony of many teachers’ lack of intercultural competence and sensitivity towards their learners’ cultural diversity as well as an ignorance about the underlying emotionality of certain topics. I consequently advocate for teachers to reflect on their used terminology, methodology, and materials accordingly. Thereby, the perhaps well-intentioned but certainly problematic activity of an intercultural lunch to which everybody brings food from their alleged ‘home country’ can easily be modified into an intercultural lunch to which everybody brings their favourite dish.

In foreign language education, even though the focus on ‘target language cultures’ has been contested through work on *linguae francae* and international languages, efforts towards a late modernist understanding of culture, and the emergence of the critical intercultural speaker, the national paradigm is still present in educational practice (Grünewald, 2012; Kramersch, 2006; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Specifically, culture in FLE is frequently limited to providing learners with factual knowledge on the history, politics, and social framework connected with target cultures (Schumann, 2019b; Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2015). In this regard, Grünewald (2012: 55) argues that the reduction of interculturality to the so-called *Landeskunde* stems from a prevailing insecurity among educators in connection with the theoretical conceptualisation and practical implementation of the complex construct of intercultural education. As Kumaravadivelu (2008: 172–173) explains:

[I]n most formal systems of language education, the learning and teaching of culture have been confined to the learning and teaching of the cultural beliefs and practices associated with the members of the target language (TL)

community, that is, the community of people speaking the second or foreign language (L2) that the learners are studying.

On the contrary, drawing on a transnational, late modernist, and open understanding of culture and with languages being used for communication internationally, the expression ‘target culture’ needs to be challenged and may have become obsolete as “no plurality and diversity is expressed” (Boeckmann, 2006: 12). In addition, the exclusive focus on certain countries “not only treats contemporary cultural challenges inadequately but it also neglects the L2 learners’ need for developing global cultural consciousness” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 173). In the case of EFL, Syrbe and Rose (2018: 152) have also emphasised that learners are more likely to use the language as a lingua franca than in conversations with L1 speakers. Consequently, Kramersch (2009: 235) advocates “revisit[ing] the traditional teaching of culture in foreign language education” which should start with reconceptualising “culture as an open, fluid (‘hybrid’) and individual (yet non-arbitrary) construct” (Blell & Doff, 2014: 81). Thus, a wider perspective and the inclusion of various viewpoints is required (Sercu, 2000) to adequately do justice to the complexity of a diverse, globalised world (Lütge, 2019). Moreover, the inclusion of affective and action-oriented dimensions of intercultural education needs to be strengthened to counter the prevailing focus on cognitive aspects and move beyond *Landeskunde* (Grünwald, 2011).

Furthermore, I consider processes of othering, stereotyping, and the perpetuation of the self-other dichotomy highly problematic in teaching practice. This relates to previously addressed aspects such as the used teaching materials and applied methodology which can reinforce othering and exclusion (Hintermann et al., 2014). Albeit perhaps unintentional and well-meaning, the following scenario is not an observed singularity in secondary education: A learner is put in the spotlight and asked the complex, emotional, and certainly highly uncomfortable question: “Since you are black, what do you think about racism in Austria? Are we all racists and treat you badly here?” When inquired about their underlying aim, the educator explained that they do not shy away from cultural diversity and complex topics but want to make them explicit. This clear lack of empathy and critical self-reflection of one’s own teaching practices and foregrounding of differences calls for improved professional development. In connection with the emergence and solidification of stereotypes, Hintermann et al. (2014) have also criticised certain words and phrases used in the Austrian context, such as ‘Black Africa’, “whose use runs the risk of reinforcing pupils’ existing stereotypes” (Hintermann et al., 2014: 92). In addition, the uncritical and unreflective use of certain activities included in textbooks can bear the danger of solidifying instead of deconstructing stereotypes and reinforcing othering processes (e.g. Peskoller, 2022). On the contrary, education in a context of plurality needs to criticise and abandon dynamics of ethnocentricity and exclusion (Lütge, 2019: 203). Therefore, documents such as the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Council of Europe, 2022), in which critical incidents are explicitly addressed and reflected on, need to be handled with care. Despite the fact that the authors declare that intercultural

encounters can take many shapes and forms, all the examples provided in the text's rationale refer solely to different countries (Council of Europe, 2022: 3). As Ferri (2018: 26) remarks,

the danger in analysing and labelling encounters and experiences as 'inter-cultural' is rooted in the implicit reproduction of power relations in which the subject positions of the participants are assigned according to the prevalent discourses of a given socio-political context, albeit hidden behind the label of cultural difference.

As I believe all encounters to be intercultural encounters, they can indeed constitute meaningful starting points for intercultural learning but need to be accompanied by critical analyses, (self-)reflection and discussion activities; if learners are not invited to "critically scrutinize stereotyped identities" (Hintermann et al., 2014: 99), othering might be encouraged instead of dismantled.

Lastly, ignoring the existing in-class diversity and treating students as linguistically and culturally homogeneous (Martinez, 2019) constitutes a final issue in teaching practice I want to highlight. The results from the aforementioned TALIS revealing that only a small share of the surveyed teachers indicated to feel (well-)prepared to work in a multicultural classroom setting (Schmich & Itzlinger-Bruneforth, 2019) provide a possible albeit shocking explanation for this observation. Hence, Gogolin's (2008) demonstrated monolingual habitus of a multilingual school seems to apply to intercultural dimensions as well. As a result, both pre- and in-service teachers need to receive proper training in connection with multilingual and intercultural education to receive guidance for its implementation and to develop the required competences and sensitivity themselves.

Looking at the syllabus for pre-service teacher education at Austrian universities, however, courses with a focus on interculturality and diversity remain rare and are mostly offered as electives. While in-service teachers should, ideally, already possess the respective capabilities to implement intercultural teaching and learning, TALIS has shown that this is not necessarily the case in the Austrian context. Moreover, I find the following two observations in connection with professional development for teachers in Austria alarming: On the one hand, there are only a few courses available that tackle intercultural matters and those that do frequently fall through due to insufficient registrations. On the other hand, the offered courses' contents and methodology often fail to adopt a critical and reflexive approach towards interculturality that is essential today (Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021) but adhere to rather dated, essentialist concepts of culture. Hence, teacher education and professional development are urgently called upon to address these shortcomings and provide adequate training in connection with interculturality (Svarstad, 2021).

Conclusion and outlook

In this chapter, I have outlined my understanding of culture and interculturality and conceptualised the classroom as a meaningful meeting place and valuable

starting point for intercultural learning. Having looked at relevant educational policy documents in Austria, I proceeded to map out what I consider significant aims and challenges in the discourse and attempted to provide ideas for the implementation of intercultural education both from a content and a methodological perspective.

Among other aspects, I have highlighted the need to move past the prevailing overemphasis on nationalities and countries. In language education, this entails expanding the focus to include various perspectives and explore different contexts in which the language is used, particularly against the backdrop of English as a lingua franca (Baker, 2015; Holmes & Dervin, 2016). More broadly, as learners (and teachers) demonstrate a virtually infinite number of categories in which they can show commonalities and differences, with their nationality being only one of them, the emphasis should be put on the diverse and complex nature of identities. Unreflectingly referring to learners' (presumed) country of origin and making assumptions and attributions about their identities and culture(s) promotes othering processes and can do great harm to students' well-being and readiness to learn.

Hence, I believe that educators face a balancing act in their daily teaching practice: On the one hand, ignoring differences and treating learners as a homogeneous group denies them access to their diverse identities, experiences, and opinions, and goes against contemporary educational objectives suitable for a pluralistic, globalised world. On the other hand, overemphasising differences and heterogeneity among learners can reinforce othering processes and the emergence or solidification of stereotypes inside classrooms. What is necessary for teachers is to constantly reflect on their practices through critically evaluating their materials and methodology, and questioning and deconstructing possible pre-established notions and solidified images. (Language) educators should not be intimidated by the complexity and impediments connected with interculturality, but can and should adopt an intercultural pedagogy and make intercultural topics explicit inside their classrooms. Getting to know one's learners and their stories and acknowledging the existing diversity inside any group is vital, but has to be approached with utmost sensitivity and care. Creating a safe and comfortable learning environment and empowering learners in their dynamic identities, all students can be invited to share their experiences and exchange opinions without pressure or an immanent threat of being singled out. Thus, educators from all fields need to interculturalise their approaches through entering a dialogue with teachers from the same or differing subjects, levels, or educational institutions to receive other perspectives on interculturality and intercultural teaching practices.

My elaborations thus demonstrate rigorous demands for teacher education such as the need for interculturality to become a central element of teacher training and professional development (Dervin et al., 2020; Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021; Svarstad, 2021). Assigning intercultural matters an enhanced role in curricula and assessing the quality of offered courses in teacher education is pivotal, as high-quality intercultural education can only be integrated through interculturally competent educators. Thus, if teachers are not adequately prepared for the global classroom and dated approaches to culture and interculturality are

perpetuated, students will not be adequately prepared for global citizenship, as a consequence. Also, teacher education needs to be interculturalised in itself, which involves processes of critical analysis, reflection, and discussion regarding redesigning its contents, aims, and approaches moving towards a critical interculturality and critical teacher education (Banegas & Gerlach, 2021; Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021, 2022).

Based on an open, dynamic, and highly individual understanding of culture, identity, and interculturality, I have argued that, essentially, every encounter between individuals is an intercultural encounter. Consequently, terms such as ‘culture clash’ or ‘culture shock’ need to be questioned and problematised as they suggest a static, closed, and negative view of culture that does not do justice to the complex and heterogeneous realities present in societies and schools today. Intercultural matters need to be addressed explicitly, on a content level, and included implicitly, on a methodological level, by harnessing the existing in-class diversity as a meaningful starting point for intercultural learning. Thereby, the development of open, respectful, and empathetic global citizens as a central goal in contemporary teaching practice can be decisively promoted.

We are all different in different ways which makes the world so colourful and interesting. If we show a willingness to relativise our own viewpoints, engage in a dialogue with others, and cherish multiperspectivity, we can learn a lot from and with each other and grow together.

Let's celebrate: Unity in diversity.

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