

## THE PROBLEM OF DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

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*En sociologia es parla de "qualitats constructores" i de "qualitats marcadors". La vinculació es refereix a la competència d'aquelles persones que són capaces de superar la distància que experimentem entre diferents grups de persones.*

*Les persones vinculadores són molt importants per a la societat multicultural. Ara fa uns deu anys, en la societat multicultural holandesa, es va introduir l'assignatura Moviments espirituals i ideològics a les escoles, que té un paper principal en l'educació, tant en la formació professional com en l'educació primària. En aquestes classes, s'informa els alumnes i els estudiants sobre els diferents moviments espirituals religiosos i no religiosos de la societat holandesa. Les classes volen "desenvolupar la sensibilitat envers les diferents formes en què les persones satisfan les seves necessitats espirituals". Aquestes classes formen part dels punts principals en la formació bàsica als Països Baixos. En aquests punts, es menciona la importància d'una certa actitud i conducta d'obertura envers "l'altre" (particularment envers la unitat de l'altre) i l'acceptació dels valors que els altres defensen.*

*L'educació i la socialització en la pròpia cultura, com també l'educació i el fet d'aculturar en la cultura de l'altre, són el centre d'atenció principal d'aquesta comunicació. En aquesta mena d'educació, el desenvolupament de "qualitats pont" permetrà que l'infant i l'estudiant tinguin un paper molt important en la construcció de la cohesió per a la societat. Les persones pont són les que tenen en compte la separació.*

In this article, we will discuss the problem of diversity in the classroom. In the Dutch society, a teacher meets the world in her classroom. Her pupils are not only from Holland, they are from all over the world. They grew up in different backgrounds. They are socialized in different family backgrounds as well as in various cultural backgrounds. In almost every classroom we notice a gap between the background of the teacher and the roots of her pupils. There are also gaps between the various backgrounds of the children themselves.

In the first introductory paragraph we will start with an exploration of the kind of gaps the teachers might be confronted with in their classroom. An outline of the history of diversity in Dutch society in the second paragraph drafts the exo- and macrosystem, being the wider context of diversity in the classroom. The history of diversity with its consequence of 'pillarization' has influenced the Dutch school system, the mesosystem in which the child participates reaching the age of four. Next, in the third paragraph, we will value the gap as a transition in the ecological system. This transition stimulates the development of the child. The identity of the school and Religious Education (RE) as an influential subject in Christian schools constitutes the mesosystem the child enters. This is the subject of the fourth paragraph. Then, in paragraph five we make a change from describing the gap as a problem, to valuing the gap as a challenge. In this paragraph we describe a research project we worked on for ten years, to study the effect of intercultural and interreligious education. Next, in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> paragraphs, we turn to the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of the perceived gap in intercultural encounters. The 8<sup>th</sup> paragraph is used to articulate the gap, in order to arrive at bridging the gap in the 9<sup>th</sup> paragraph. The last paragraph stresses, as a conclusion of what is arrived at in the previous paragraphs, the need of strengthening understanding in order to respect and tolerate the uniqueness of the identity of 'the other'.

## 1. Introduction

Looking at the pupils in front of her, a Dutch teacher sees a variety of personalities, a variety of competences to be developed. Boys and girls in her classroom differ in many aspects. It is a common thing to classify the children according to their ethnical background. Starting with the dominant group in Holland, the teacher sees Dutch children, and 'other' children, the 'others' being Turkish, Moroccan, Indonesian or of Surinam background. Though most of her children were born in Holland, they are classified according to their parents' coun-

try of birth. Instead of classifying them by ethnic background, the teacher could also classify her pupils by gender, seeing boys and girls. And probably noticing a boyish girl or a feminine boy. She knows that some of her pupils are good at sports, so she could also classify them by the different sports activities, like football, athletics or mental games. She then makes groups of football-players, runners and chess-players. From yet another perspective she sees children good at mathematics and children with narrative skills, pupils loving arts, and some loosing themselves in word-games. Diversity is all around! (see also Bakker, in: Chidester 1999).

One of the traditional ways of categorizing in Holland is the religious tradition children and their parents belong to. Religious diversity resulted in the pillarized society of the second half of the last century. The roots for this pillarized society are to be found in the history of Holland.

## 2. Diversity in Dutch society

The history of the Netherlands shows a long tradition in diversity, starting with the immigration of Protestants from France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For centuries, the Netherlands have been considered a tolerant country that draws and welcomes foreigners. Dutch people are proud of their tolerance, which they define as 'withholding a negative reaction upon actions one does not agree with in principle' (Schuyt 2001).

Since the Second World War (1939-1945), immigration has been dominated by 'guest workers'. Young men, mainly from Turkey and Morocco, came to Western Europe to join the labour force working for the rehabilitation of the various countries. As it turned out, the 'guest workers' stayed far longer in the Netherlands than expected. 'Guest workers' turned into 'immigrants' and from 'alien Dutchmen' they became members of an 'ethnic minority' and they ended up as 'fellow-countrymen'. This process of changing names reflects the change in appreciation of the newcomers by the indigenous people of the Netherlands. This appreciation changes over time from exotic and positive to fearful and aggressive.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, approximately 285,000 people of Moroccan origin and 330,000 of Turkish descent have their residence in Holland. In total, the Netherlands has a population of an estimated 16 million people.

In the same period, the process of secularisation was in develop-

ment. In this process, certain aspects of culture are no longer driven or dominated by religious institutions and symbols (Dekker 1993). The various fields in which people engage, like the field of family-life, the world at work, in school or during their time off, are no longer considered to be under the 'sacred canopy' (Berger 1967). Neither is there any longer a common religious base that directs the actions of people.

### 2.1. From homogeneous to heterogeneous

When the immigration process started, though, Holland was still a homogenous Christian nation. As a result of the immigration in the second half of the last century, Dutch society developed from a homogeneous monoculture to a heterogeneous multicultural society whose main characteristic was cultural pluralism with a variety of value orientations. Nowadays, the distinct cultures that are visible in our society do not only differ, they may even be conflicting. Being confronted with aspects of other cultures can be a trigger to progression in insight, stimulating change. A significant example illustrating the confrontation with different values is the difference in an aspect of awareness of reality, such as the situating of the Self. Dutch culture knows a self-awareness that is person-oriented (Keller in: Alma 1998). Turkish and Moroccan cultures are called position-oriented; this relates to the education of boys and girls and the different perspectives on the future, and as a result the different educational opportunities offered to them.

Meeting other cultures is not the only trigger for change. Within cultures patterns also shift and move. Culture is not static but changes continuously. Although in the middle of the last century the culture of the Netherlands might be considered homogeneous from an ethnic perspective, we can distinguish different groups with their own distinct culture. Especially in the domain of religion, a cultural diversity of different denominations was apparent. The organization of Dutch society was based on religious diversity and religious boundaries. This is called 'denominationalism', 'pillarization' or 'corporate pluralism'. Pillarization is, in the middle of the twentieth century, the Dutch answer to diversity. Each group derives its identity from the pillar they belong to. Boundaries are clear, hard to be crossed. People derive their personal identity from the group they belong to. The pillarized Dutch society of that period can be seen as an example of diversity within a homogeneous culture, as a specific case of 'unity in diversity', not to be mixed up with the 'unitive pluralism' as Paul Knitter has described (Knitter 1995).

## 2.2. From guest worker to fellow-Dutchman

When immigration started, the native Dutchman considered himself to be the 'host', the immigrant being the 'guest'. The expectations towards the 'guest workers', however, change over time. The host society prefers assimilation or integration of the guests. Public demand initially is rather in favour of 'integration emphasizing one's own culture', recently changing in developing an attitude of Dutch citizenship accepting democratic values and an open attitude towards 'the other'.

It is not only that the opinion of the 'host' changes over time; also the ideas of the immigrants are influenced by their participation in the Dutch society. The prolonged stay in Dutch society of men from Turkey and Morocco, and, at a later stage, the stay of their families as well, also influences the newcomers' culture. In their culture, the Islamic religion plays a special role. For Muslims, the influence of Islam extends beyond the religious domain. More than the Christian identity of the Dutch, being a Muslim permeates further than the religious domain. Apart from being a religious attitude, the Islam is also a way of life, a life-style.

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346

The attuning process entails that the migrant needs to acquaint him/her with what is going on in Dutch society on various levels. The process takes place in various domains and consists of various stages. It all starts with knowledge of the language. Subsequently, the immigrant ought to attune to the prevailing values and perceived standards in Dutch society. In most cases, the immigrant over time accepts a number of new standards, and internalizes them. This contributes to the development of a social identity in the new society. The immigrant strongly oriented to Dutch society has little or no interest in retaining the habits and customs of the native country. He feels at home in the new country. He assimilates the Dutch society, and is often is 'more Catholic than the Pope'. Immigrants who feel that the gap between their own and the new standards is too substantial, and would rather hold on to their familiar rules, will attempt to reduce the contact with Dutch society to the bare minimum. This type of attitude is predominantly found amongst migrants in whose life the wish to return to their native countries; the 'return myth', stands at their centre stage as an 'everlasting dream'. The question of 'going back home' continually bothers them. Eldering describes the aforementioned positions as moments in an acculturation strategy, as if it were a 'decision tree' of choice processes (Eldering 2002).

The migrant not only gets acquainted with Dutch society on a per-

sonal level; in fact, much of the contact takes place on the level of institutions such as those of the police, housing and education. We will return to the topic of education in the paragraphs to come.

The extent to which a minority group perceives itself as dissimilar from the environment is an important aspect in pillarization and depillarization. The same holds for the extent to which the groups are resistant against influences that threaten their group and personal identity. The process of depillarization is characterised by the different strategies that people use. One of them is the strategy of self-appointed isolation. Immigrants who strongly hold on to their traditional habits are an example of the result of such a strategy. Another is the strategy of ideological border-contact, which means a continuing dialogue with dissidents in the context of progressive desegregation. An example is the immigrants who transform their native identity, as a result of this border-contact, into a new Dutch identity showing elements of both cultures like a patch-work design.

The reunion of families contributed to the visibility of the newcomers in larger areas of society. In migrant cultures, people differ in the way they emphasize their relation to the host society. Whereas the guest worker mainly considers the question: 'when can I go back home?', the immigrant realizes as time passes that he will never go back home again. The change of perspective from 'when can I go back home?' to 'We are not homeward bound, we are at home already' marks the beginning of the process of obtaining one's own position and constructing a new identity in Dutch society.

### 2.3. Diversity shows up in school

'We are at home' is a sentence spoken by migrant families in Holland who intend to raise their children in order to become citizens in the democratic and multicultural Dutch society. The more permanent stay of migrant families in Dutch society brought about a great change in Dutch schools. Until then, Dutch schools were predominantly homogeneous 'white' schools. In the Dutch situation, a 'white' school means that the school population consists of Dutch children. The entrance of migrant children created the so-called 'black schools'. Being a white or a black school has nothing to do with the denomination of the schools. It is the percentage of migrant children that gives a school a white or black colour, which of course constitutes the identity of the school. Of all schools, 15 % are a so-called 'black school'. These schools are more or less evenly spread amongst the Protestant and Roman-Catholic schools; a slightly higher percentage

is found in the public schools. The presence of migrant children as 'the other' in the classroom brings about a fundamental change in the Dutch school system, which affects the classroom climate and the identity of the school.

Being a Protestant or a Roman-Catholic school in the pillarized Dutch educational system, is an important building block in the identity of the school, as well as in the identity of teachers and parents committed to the school. The formal and documented identity of the school differs from the day-to-day identity the student experiences in the classroom. The initially unique Christian identity, which shows itself in the Morning Prayer and storytelling from the Bible, becomes problematic. 'How to pray?' and 'What kind of religious stories to tell?' are pressing questions for teachers. Teachers and parents question the school being of a Christian denomination any longer, since in the so-called 'black schools' Muslim children make up more than 90% of the pupils.

The arrival of foreign Muslim pupils gives individual school-teams food for thought. The Protestant and Roman Catholic schools reflect upon how to cope with this new group of children and especially how to cope with the 'other'-ness in religion of these children. New models of education are developed, like the model of encounter and the interreligious model. These models in the macrosystem (the general field of education) influence the mesosystem in which the child participates as the one being educated. It is not only the macrosystem that influences the mesosystem, the mesosystem is also shaped by the official religion the parents are dedicated to. Also this mesosystem is influenced by parental belief systems on education and RE, which mirrors the diversity in cultural roots of the parents. In the schools diversity in faith can not be hidden any more. Christianity is not in the centre of thought any more; it is no longer the only unifying inspiration. '...the sources of morality, of what is good and fair, are polycentric. The characteristic of the situation is that none of these sources has the overall priority and authority in inspiration, nor over the people who acknowledged the source of inspiration. All the members choose from the abounding offer what suits them. Morality is individualized. Critics on the choice made is absent or is dismissed as inappropriate' (Emberley 1995). The same can be said in the case of religion.

Across the pillars we notice in the day-to-day practice similarities in the description of the observed gap in faith and culture. Accordingly we observe similarities in preliminary answers that parents, teachers

and governors provide to the question of polycentricism of sources of inspiration. In some schools exclusiveness dominates, which means that the gap is noticed but neglected. The school positions itself in the Christian tradition. Teachers as well as pupils are Christians. No other tradition is taught to the pupils. In other schools inclusiveness is practised, which means that across the noticed gap similarities are found and used as a common ground in faith development. Though the teachers are mainly Christian, they teach the children about the other religious traditions as well. Pupils are socialized in the Christian tradition, or in one of the other religious traditions. Yet another group of schools specialises in creating the prerequisites for interreligious dialogue. Teachers may be Christian or Muslim. Children also are rooted in different religious traditions. The school team acknowledges the differences at both sides of the gap and uses them as a starting point in religious communication (see also: Knitter, 1986).

One of the necessary prerequisites for religious communication, and for interreligious dialogue in particular, is the provision of objective information about the religious tradition of the 'other'. The Dutch government tried to fulfil the need for the transfer of knowledge of other cultures and religions by introducing the subject of 'Spiritual and Ideological Movements' in the Dutch educational system. Diversity has captured a permanent place in Dutch education. This is considered to be a necessary experience in order to grow up to be a citizen in the democratic and multicultural Dutch society.

### **3. Valuing the gap**

Speaking of 'a necessary experience in order to ...' is what we call a value-loaded expression. It is a normative and prescriptive sentence. The sentence contains a valuation. The positive valuation of the skills of an adult equipped for intercultural communication.

Educating children is not a neutral activity. In education adults bring to bear their influence on the development of the child. Parents and teachers make choices on the basis of the priority in their value-orientation. The priority in values determines in what direction they stimulate the development of the child. The priority in values makes certain goals in education worth aiming at, and others be kept away from. Parents and teachers set the goals and the rules in the daily practice of education. Education can never be valueless, it is always value-loaded. Though, of course, there can be differences in the priority of values according to which parents and teachers make their choices

and decide for their actions. Diversity is a central theme in present education.

The main goal in valuing the gap is to aim at understanding in the communicative practice with 'the other'. To be able to comprehend the ideas of 'the other' it is necessary to have mastered the ability to change points of view, to be able to take the standpoint of the other, to see the world through the eyes of 'the other' and from his frame of reference. Changing standpoints means that the child has learned to distance himself from his own point of view, his own arguments and his own convictions. In order to come closer to the other, the child has to learn to distance himself from his own point of view. 'Decentration' is the skill people use in communicative practices with 'the other' with whom they disagree and whom they wish to understand. The willingness to understand precedes entering into communication. Willingness is at the base of giving room to other ideas, other priorities in valuations in order to reach understanding. Understanding the other means showing a genuine interest in the other. The self-respect of the parent and the teacher, and the respect they show for the child, is the point of reference for the child to develop his own value orientation. Starting at the self-respect of his educator, the child learns to develop his own self-esteem which opens up the possibility for showing respect for the other. For 'respect' we think of behaviour that shows esteem, either in a relationship of authority, or in the relation of appreciation of an achievement of an ethical high standard. Respect prevents from injuring the other.

Respect opens up the dialogue, to share what is in common related to the joint field of interest: the school, the village or the city, the world as a global village. In these communities diversity is the central theme. In the heart of diversity, there is its unitive force. This diversity generates unitive forces, which is called 'unitive pluralism' according to Knitter. Where the will to understand is absent, we run up against the boundaries of diversity. People willing to understand, tolerate a deviation of their own points of view, they accept divergence in valuations. As Schuyt (2001) stated, tolerance is restricted by a lack of willingness to withhold negative reactions in the confrontation with meanings and actions you strongly disagree with. Tolerance presupposes peaceful disagreement resulting from a plurality in opinions and convictions. In Holland we have a long tradition in handling different, sometimes even conflicting, beliefs.

To reach tolerance, the skill of reflection has to be developed and trained. In a reflective process, students come to see what practices

they value positively and what actions in their daily practice they feel ashamed of. At the base of their evaluative remarks is their value orientation. In his 'Value Theory' Rescher states: 'Values are reflected in the justification and in the recommendation of actions' (Rescher 1969, 3). In his opinion 'the fundamental role of a person's value is to underwrite the evaluation of his actions' (Rescher, 1969, 11). Values qualify reflective skills. Rescher differentiates values in the following categories:

Whose values are we talking about: the values of a person, of a profession, of a city, of a nation?

What is valued: what kind of object, what kind of situation, what kind of content, what type of needs?

Who is in favour of the values: is it me, or is it the other?

Is the value worthwhile to be aspired to in its own right, or does the value help to realise another value? Like efficiency helps to realise prosperity.

How to make an abstract value concrete, in what way is the value specified by its context? The concordance in values is striking over different time periods, in different religions and in various contexts. All of them showing variations of the Ten Commandments (Choraqui 2002).

Values become clear in the argumentations about rules and regulations. Surpassing rules and regulations gives feelings of inconvenience. Rules and regulations are part of the education at school, in the Teacher Training College as well as in primary school. The confrontation with different rules and regulations, and the values that are at the base, stimulates the development of the value orientation of the student, and in a corresponding way of the pupil in primary school. Differences in rules at home and at school show the gap in priority in values in both systems the child participates in. It is this gap that we explore in the next paragraph.

#### **4. The gap in the school**

Being aware of the common ground in different educational contexts, we all know from our daily practice the differences that show up leaving one context, for example the context of the family, and entering another, for example the context of the classroom. In the next paragraph we will take a look at the kind of gap the child is confronted with entering school.

#### 4.1. Ecological transition

Bronfenbrenner describes the change of context as an ecological transition (Bronfenbrenner 1979). In his theoretical model the first transition occurs by reaching the age of four, when the child goes to primary school. The child then leaves the microsystem of the family and enters as a participant the mesosystem of education. Ecological transitions, in the view of Bronfenbrenner, cause a change in role that stimulates the development of the child. Development, he states, is 'the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties' (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The 'evolving conception of the ecological environment' also holds to the value orientation. In the view of Bronfenbrenner, the child is an active learner, discovering existing values and - in his or her relation to existing values - constructing his own value orientation. His view on the child as an active participant resembles the view of Dewey, who also stresses the participation of the child in the learning environment in order to transform existing know-how into his own knowledge (Dewey 1938/1999)

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352

Entering another ecological area means a growing consciousness of what one is familiar with until the moment of transition. As well for the child as for the teacher in the classroom. Every time a child enters her classroom the teacher starts with an introduction into the classroom climate. In order to know how to make the child familiar with the rules, she herself has to be aware of the values and their concretizations that constitute the classroom climate.

#### 4.2. The mesosystem: school identity

'What kind of climate is it that I am striving for?', is a main question for her, related to the question of 'What kind of school are we?'

In the situation that a complete team of a school is exploring and researching the climate of the culture of the school, they could start to study the text in the directory of the school. This is the first step in the 'circle of reflection' (Korthagen 2001, Ter Avest 2003).

They could also start to take a serious look at their own daily practice, or ask the parents how they experience the climate of the school. The next step in the 'circle of reflection' is to turn their mind over the question what the text in the directory of the school means to them, or in what way the opinion of the parents affects them. It is also

important to reflect on the way the ideas of the parents influence the teachers in their self-image of the school. What are the ideas of the parents concerning 'good education' and what do teachers themselves consider to be 'good education'? In this phase of the reflection process subject of discussion is to what extent the image and the opinion of the parents coincide with the image the teachers themselves have concerning the school and how they formulated their own image as it is laid down in the official documents of the school, like the directory of the school.

In the process of reflection not only the professional biography is part of the process. The next step, the third step in the 'reflection circle' is the search for values that lie below the texts and opinions considered in the process until now. The value orientation and the affective commitment to it are rooted in the personal biography of the student and the teacher. Reflection upon the interrelatedness of personal and professional biography gives the student and the teacher insight in the 'subjective theory on education'.

The affective commitment to the school climate and the identity of the school sensitizes teachers to certain aspects of identity, or the lack of them. In their daily practice teachers validate newly developed findings. This stimulates their creative mind to develop alternatives for those aspects in the daily practice that disagree with the established points of view or policies. Subsequently the teachers explore the possible alternatives to improve their educational practice in accordance with the desired identity of the school.

The last phase in the 'circle of reflection' is to select from the alternatives the most attractive one to try out in daily practice. This last phase at the same time is the first phase in the next loop through the 'circle of reflection'. Reflection upon the identity of the school is a continuing story. The school climate, or the identity of the school, is realised in the daily practice of the teacher in her classroom, and in the mutuality and commonality of these realizations.

#### 4.3. Religious Education (RE) as part of the school identity

Religious education is one of the practices in which the school's identity is realised. The way a teacher for example presents religious traditions, or her choice to talk about only one religious tradition, is a building block for the identity of the school. At the same time the presentation of the teacher reflects the formal identity of the school as it is written down in the official school documents.

In Christian schools in Holland, teachers inform their pupils about the answers that are found to vital questions in the Holy Scripture.

They particularly do so during the RE lessons. In the schools where they practice Interreligious Education, teachers also present to the children the narrations of non-Christian religions, like Hinduism and Islam. In these narrations children learn about the encounter with God and how to live with the questions resulting from this encounter.

It is not only during the lessons in religious education that children learn about the important questions in life. Teachers not only tell about these questions, they are also an example in living the possible answers to vital dilemmas. If such is the case, we speak of a broad or liberal conception of school identity. In schools where only during the RE lessons religion, religious values and narratives come up, we speak of a narrow conception of the denominational identity of the school. Identity can be defined as 'broad' and 'narrow'; it can also be specified as 'formal' and 'informal'. What is written down in official documents reveals the formal identity of the school; the daily practice of education as it is established in the classroom reveals the lived or informal identity of the school. The identity of the school, as it is practiced in lessons in religious education as well as in school community life, influences the religious development of the children. This also holds for developmental processes in language skills like the understanding and active use of metaphors. This we call an eclectic interpretation of the concept of identity in the school, in relation to the development of the religious identity of the pupil (Ter Avest 2003).

Religious identity is the main concern in RE. Special attention is given in RE to the different religious traditions and within these traditions the way people think of God and the relationship of God and men. Not aiming at a universalistic point of view that all traditions essentially are the same, but seeking after the insight in the plurality of traditions, which means that every tradition has its own accents in their stories about the basic experience of men and their relationship to God. Accents that are contextually bound (see also: Jackson 2000). The aim of RE in an intercultural and interreligious context is to bring about the willingness, or even the eagerness, to interact with 'the other' and to be prepared to give account of the cognitive and affective motives in daily practices. Each teacher in this situation is obliged to make all the effort to create a context rich with possibilities of learning experiences, as they are described by Dewey (1938/1999). A characteristic of such a learning experience is that it always contains a kind of conflict. This conflict invites the pupil to enter, under the guidance of the teacher, to leave the developmental zone of free movement, where the child feels comfortable (also called the comfort zone), to explore the zone of promoted action (Vygotsky 1997,

Breeuwsma 1999). This zone of promoted action is aimed for in the encounter with peers from different backgrounds (Ter Avest 2003). Also in a so-called homogeneous classroom situation, heterogeneity is part of the culture, as we have noted at the beginning of this article, for example heterogeneity in eye colour, family size and last but not least: gender. Teachers stimulate the inquisitiveness and the willingness to make use of creative skills in exploring the apparently conflictuous situation in order to share the things that are in common.

#### 4.4. Classroom climate

To create an atmosphere of developmental challenges for the children, the teacher needs pedagogical competences. The pedagogical competence incorporates the skill to analyse patterns of communication in the classroom. At the same time the pedagogical competent teacher should be able to interfere in classroom discussions if necessary. To do justice to her own subjective theory, education means that the teacher is able to integrate her own experiences into her professional actions. Between the experiences of the teacher and those of her pupils there can be an enormous gap. If only we think of the socio-economical backgrounds the teacher and her pupils live in, we notice the dilemmas the teacher can be faced with. As a matter of fact, we should be careful in using the concept of 'background' and 'culture' as static concepts. Scheffer states that we should not assume 'that societies can sensibly be seen as composed of distinct, separate things called 'cultures', each of which has strong internal bonds, clear boundaries, and great durability over time'. He sees culture as a hybrid concept: 'people spill uncontrollably out of the neat little boxes of the multiculturalist worldview' (Scheffer 2003).

Let us consider the example of a certain teacher being confronted with a situation in which a discriminative remark was uttered about one of her pupils. Immediately afterwards another pupil brightens up the situation with a discriminative joke. The moment the child makes the humorous remark about the black colour of the skin of one of the other pupils, the teacher at the same time considers all the different options in background which could have caused the child to make this kind of joke.

It could have been that the child was in need of attention, especially of his peers. He might have aimed at the whole class laughing, because in the end the situation was also very funny. Probably the child is a child in need of attention, and he has learned in his young life that this kind of remarks gives him attention, somehow. It did, indeed, brighten up the situation.

Another possibility could have been that the child is easily attracted by different stimuli from outside the immediate context of the classroom conversation. The teacher is aware of his restless attitude when another child is telling a story. For the teacher, this often causes tension. At the moment the discriminative joke was made, he had already been sitting on his chair listening to other children for too long a period, at least for him it was too long a period of time. The discriminative remark of his classmate attracted his attention and he was immediately in for fun. Without giving it a second thought he made his funny remark.

There is still another possibility that the teacher considers in this short minute that she has for reflection. The family in which the child is raised is strongly resistant against foreigners in the country. The remark that the child makes in the classroom might be a remark he is used to at home. In the perception of the teacher those remarks at home are not being meant humorously, but are meant extremely serious by the parents. The father of the child once approached the teacher complaining about the lack of attention she had for the needs of their child. The teacher remembers very well her angry reaction to this complaint, because she had spent so much time in aiding the child to master maths problems.

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356

And last but not least, the remark can be a sign of bullying. That was a possibility mentioned by her colleague when she discussed situations like this in a meeting of intervision. One of her colleagues then advised to make every effort to tackle this problem. Her colleague even mentioned the possibility of training with video in the classroom to show pupils their own actions and communication patterns in order to improve the situation.

It is in one moment's time that the teacher realizes all these different options, each of them being far away from her own point of view. A huge gap, showing the difference in the points of view of herself as a teacher, and the child raised by parents from a different background. It is especially the situation with the complaining parent that is very clear in her mind as a 'critical incident'. She felt powerless at that very moment, not having the competence to defend the child against the prejudices of his father. It is this aspect that stimulates her to tackle the topic of 'discrimination' and 'prejudice', at the very same moment in her classroom.

At this instance the teacher remembers this meeting with the father as a 'critical incident', an incident that changed her way of thinking on the subject of discrimination and prejudice. She is still very much aware of the feelings of incompetence she experienced in the presence of this father seeming delighted to speak of some of her pupils as of a

minor class. At this very moment she decides to tackle this problem. In her view it is the task of a teacher to enlarge the world. Without running down the values of the family, the teacher decides to work on the concept of 'discrimination', what the word means, where it stems from and how it works. She not only points to the negative aspects, she also shows the positive aspect of discrimination in the sense of making a distinction, making a difference. She shows her pupils that signalling differences and categorizing according to the differences, makes the world well-organized. She guides the children on their tour into new connotations of the concept of 'discrimination'. The old connotation is broken up. The newly developed comprehension of the concept of 'discrimination' functions as a bridge from the old meaning to a new understanding.

Children develop in context, the context as they themselves perceive it. There is not a kind of objective situation; there is only the event as it is perceived by the person. It is the person who gives a certain meaning to the environment. It is like a hilly landscape in a shimmering heat, with bushes and an old farm in the distance. To the hiker the bushes mean shadowy places to rest before he comes to the farm where he can ask for some water. To the soldier in wartime, the bushes are possible hiding places from the enemy, and the farm might be a trap. It is the person and his frame of reference that ascribes the situation a certain meaning (Kurt Lewin cited in: Bronfenbrenner 1979, 24).

Pedagogy, and especially intercultural pedagogy, arises from the sense of self-and-other, but it has a particular slant: it is a set of abilities through which an individual observes another, judges him or her according to some standard, and intervenes to bring the child's behaviour into conformity with that standard. This standard is aesthetic in the sense that it involves a sophisticated aesthetic judgment of what constitutes a good performance, whether using social or technical skills. It also involves representing the difference between the pedagogue's own ability and that of the child. Essential of the standard is that it is fluid and re-interpretable (Carrithers 1992). For this process of re-interpretation, which is a process of transformation and intercreation, we should explore 'beneath the surface of practical thinking ... continuing acts of creativity – the invention of new ways of handling old and new problems' (Sylvia Scribner in: Carrithers 1992).

## 5. The gap: from problem to challenge

With the arrival of 'guest workers' in Holland, there was one primary school who invented 'new ways of handling old and new problems'. Diversity is a well-known problem in the Dutch society, which was solved with the creation of the pillarized society. The 'Juliana van Stolberg' primary school invented a new way of handling this old problem by developing a curriculum to teach diversity in the classroom. What seemed problematic at first glance, developed into a great challenge for teachers and parents. To change from perspective, flexibility and creativity were needed. Acknowledging the gap and, at the same time, perceiving the problem as a challenge, a model for inter-religious education has been developed in 'Juliana van Stolberg School'. Below we describe this school as an example of the way the noticed gap in cultures and in religious traditions initiated the development of a new model of interreligious education.

In this model of interreligious education, Islamic as well as Christian religious education is included in the curriculum. The starting point is the religion the child is socialised in at home. Besides that the curriculum is fine-tuned to the developmental phase of the child. For religious education this means fine-tuning to the cognitive development as well as the affective and social development. The theoretical framework for this approach is found in the *Elementarisierungstheorie van Schweitzer* i.e. (Schweitzer i.e. 1995), and Knitter's pluralistic theology (Knitter 1986, 1995). The key concept for the pupils is, in the first three years of primary school, 'identification with what is in common'; for the fourth, fifth and sixth years, the key concept is 'encounter'; for the last two years in primary school, the key concept is 'dialogue'. The similarity of this model with the interpretative approach of the Warwick Religious Education Project is striking. As in the Warwick Project, the issues of representation, interpretation and reflexivity are pivotal (Jackson 2000).

The 'Juliana van Stolberg' lessons are organized around themes that both religions have in common. In this way they have elaborated on the prophets, common narratives like the story of Moses/Musa, and symbols like the symbol of the light. According to the age of the pupils, the accent is on the common elements and the different accents of both religions. Children are confronted with different ways of acting (for example in rituals), different ways of story-telling (as with the stories of Jesus/Isa). They learn the good reasons the other has for acting different, and they notice and experience that for the others their authentic way of doing things is meaningful. In an inter-

active approach the children get acquainted in these lessons with the dynamics of encounter. They experience intersubjective pluralism in the classroom, trained in living this pluralism with the help of their teachers. The intersubjective pluralism they experience will be of great help as adults in the multicultural Dutch society.

### 5.1. Researching the gap

The model of interreligious education was developed as an initiative of parents and teachers. Eager to know what the effect of this interactive approach is for the children, we started a research project on religious development in an intercultural and interreligious context. We suspected that the lives of the children in this school carry the imprint of their particular social world, and times of rapid change could bring personal disruption and incoherence of one kind or another (Elder in: Moen 2001, 101). We consider this 'disruption and incoherence' to be a stimulating strength in their development.

The results of the research project we worked on at the end of the last century give cause for cautious optimism about interreligious education (Ter Avest 2003). In the context of the multicultural society, this system of education stimulates the development of values like 'respect' and 'tolerance' in relation to the diversity of the (religious and non-religious) philosophies of life children are socialized in.

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359

What makes the abovementioned study special is that, for the first time, a mixed population of Christian as well as Muslim children and adolescents were subject of the study. Apart from that, we have studied not only the religious education within the familiar tradition but have explicitly considered also the interreligious education. By using fourteen different research instruments, we have studied and documented the religious development of the population of our study over a period of ten years.

'God can do everything, He is very great', say all children in group six, that is in both groups the one of Islamic as well as the group of Christian socialisation. 'Let's play together, because it says so in the Koran' and 'God forbids stealing'. Those are practical consequences expressing the meaning of God for children. Over the years a difference between Christian- and Muslim-raised children emerges in the practical implications of religious commitment. A difference that arises from the difference in the way God is referred to.

This system of education stimulates religious development in the (religious or non-religious) philosophy of life that is the tradition in the family at home.

In a situation where Muslims and Christians risk being brought into an opposed or polarised position, the results of this study provide an interesting reference for education in the context of the multicultural and multi-religious Netherlands society.

One of our recommendations is aimed at the commitment of parents to education at school. Given the importance of the interrelationship with the religious development stimulated at home, we recommend further studies on the methods of reinforcing joint efforts of parents and school in religious development. Thus the external environment of the child is done justice. Together with this, the internal environment of the child needs to be challenged by the development of a religious domain and the God concept within. The way the children reacted to the stories told gave us the impression that the specific complications of emotional layering in stories needs further study, before these stories are told to children. The development of the social-emotional domain of the child, and the development from simple to more complex emotions comprised therein, should be such that the emotions that resonate in the story should be appropriate to the child's world of experience.

Education and socialisation in one's own culture, as well as education and enculturation in the culture of 'the other,' is the main focus of intercultural and interreligious education in some of the Christian schools we have called 'schools of encounter'. In the classrooms of these schools, teachers will encourage the development of 'bridging qualities'. The competences that arise from these 'bridging qualities' will enable the child and the student to play an important role in constructing cohesion in the European society.

The following three levels ask for attention in intercultural education:

- the theoretical level; you have to make a choice for a pedagogy, for example, a child-centred pedagogy

- the methodological level, for example the inductive method according to which you start at the level of the child, the kind of questions he is asking, or the problems he is facing.

- the level of the technique, for example the technique of questioning, the technique of a good lesson start so that you immediately have all the attention of the child.

Now that we have considered diversity at school and at classroom level, and have looked at the effects on the development of the children, it is time to turn to the teacher. In the next paragraph, we describe the interpersonal qualities as necessary prerequisites for a teacher in an intercultural educational context.

## **6. The gap: interpersonal**

The teacher and the child stem from different worlds. Comprehension functions as a bridge to span the two worlds of restricted understanding of a concept to a yet unknown comprehension. In sociology one speaks of 'binding qualities' and 'bridging qualities'. Binding refers to the competence of people to develop a certain commitment to persons or to a group of people. Bridging qualities we find in those persons who are able to bridge the gap we experience between different groups of people. Bridging persons are very important for a multicultural society. Recognising this importance, about fifteen years ago, the subject of 'Spiritual and Ideological Movements' was introduced in the Dutch school curriculum. These lessons inform pupils about the different world religions like Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, and world views like Humanism. The subject is meant to play an important role in education, in professional training as well as in primary education. In these lessons pupils and students are informed about the different religious and non-religious spiritual movements in Dutch society. The lessons aim at 'the development of a sensibility for the different ways in which people fulfil their spiritual needs'. These lessons are part of the main targets of basic training in the Netherlands. These targets mention the importance of a certain attitude and behaviour of openness towards 'the other', especially towards the uniqueness of the other, and the acceptance of the values others stand for.

In some of the primary schools in Holland the encounter of the different cultures can take place in a limited sense only. For the desired encounter with 'the other', teachers sometimes are the only adults that represent for the children the 'other' culture, being the main and dominant culture in the country. That is not so much regrettable if in that case children are able to learn the skills for intercultural communication. After all, intercultural communication can be taught in any context where diversity is at stake. In any classroom diversity is on all sides: diversity in competences, diversity in skills, diversity in family size, and so on. In primary schools teachers need not start with interaction between widely differing cultures. Teachers can start to make

children aware of small differences, like the difference in hair colour and family habits. But in school children should end by having the competences of intercultural and interreligious communication (Procee 1992, 197). The existence of Islamic, Protestant and Roman-Catholic schools need not be problematic, as long as the child develops cognitive and social-emotional competences to participate as a citizen in the democratic and plural Dutch society. 'It is not the equal value of cultures that justifies the presence of schools with an outstanding cultural-religious identity. The only reason for schools with an explicit and distinct identity is to be found in strengthening the children to interactive competences (Eldering quoting Procee in: Comenius, Spring 1993, 12). Intercultural education aims at the development of interactive communication competences. The way they realise this goal is in the transfer of knowledge and the development of insight in ethnic relations. That requires understanding of the nature and the extent in which ethnicity is modifying the self-concept and the religious identity.

Nussbaum, writing on the topic of 'otherness,' states that 'There is no more effective way to wake pupils up than to confront them with difference in an area where they had previously thought their own ways neutral, necessary, and natural. Exploring the way in which another society has organized matters of human well-being, or gender, or sexuality, or ethnicity and religion will make the pupil see that other people in viable societies have done things very differently' (Nussbaum 1998, 32-33). It is good to learn about those differences and to touch upon the uniqueness of each of these cultures. It is not necessary, states Nussbaum, to get familiar with many cultures, to know every particular detail of symbols and rituals in the various cultures. She compares the process of acculturation with the process of learning languages. It is important, she states, to learn to master your mother tongue: 'it seems reasonable for children to focus on one, or in some cases two, languages when they are small. On the other hand, it is also very important for students to understand what it is like to see the world through the perspective of another language, an experience that quickly shows that human complexity and rationality are not the monopoly of a single linguistic community' (Nussbaum 1998, 62).

As we have described in the previous part of this article, diversity is a common characteristic in Dutch classrooms. Different voices are heard, stemming from diversity in cultural backgrounds. Not only between pupils amongst themselves, and between pupils and their teachers do we find cultural differences heard as different voices, but

also within one person different voices are heard. In the next paragraph of this article we will explore the multivoicedness of the teacher.

## 7. The gap: intrapersonal

Let us take a look at Esther, a teacher in a Dutch classroom. She reflects upon herself, and values herself in relation to the image she has of 'a good teacher'. Sometimes, at the end of a day, she is rather proud of herself when she compares herself with this image she has of a good teacher, as a part of her 'subjective theory on education'. On other days, though, she is not so content. For example when she has punished one of her pupils. At such a moment she hears the voice of her former teacher in pedagogies stressing the point that instead of punishing a pupil, it is of much greater effect to reward a child. She hears the critical remarks of her former teacher and considers herself not such a perfect professional.

The development of a satisfying professional self-concept is hard work that can only proceed thanks to conflicting experiences that sharpen what has been taken for granted until now. Students need teachers that provide those conflicting experiences. Fortunately students are confronted with examples of good teachers who help to develop their professional identity. Examples of teachers who perform in a perfect way, as well as teachers who do not hesitate to be straight forward and show their imperfectness. Especially the last type of teachers is of great help in showing the inner conflict that stimulates the development of the student's professional identity.

The professional self-concept consists of more than one aspect. More than one voice is heard in the way the teacher presents herself in the classroom (see also Scheffer on 'multiple identities', 2003). Every model is still heard in the biography of the teacher. At least there is the model of the teacher with perfect pedagogical qualities, didactical qualities or organizational skills. Not only do professional qualities get their voice in her identity as a teacher; personal characteristics are also very demanding in being heard. There is this characteristic of hers of being a sorehead, or the one that likes to be the soul of every party. Her professional identity is a multivoiced Self (Hermans & Hermans-Janssen 1995). She herself likes best the voice that always changes a faced problem into a challenge. That one voices her Ideal Self. She feels very happy the moments that happen now and then that she realizes to perform like her wished-for Ideal Self. This feeling is referred to as a 'flow'. 'Flow' is the process of Self-realisation:

a person performs in a way he is striving at. In religious traditions it is said that persons perform like it was meant by God as He created men meant to be a reflection of God in His creation (Alma 1998).

A professional identity we expect to be of certain stability, just like we have these kinds of expectations of a personal identity. Identity presupposes continuity and recognizability. During the life course and in various contexts with different people a person shows 'more or less' the same way of doing, of behaving. People make statements like: 'That is characteristic for her', of: 'That's her peculiar way of behaving!'. Situations are not identical, but the person is identifiable the same. That's you! 'She did not change at all!' is what people say meeting you on a home-coming of your university. They notice an authentic identity.

In our society we appreciate people to be open to changes. Being a dynamic and flexible person is desirable. People, being asked to write down their Ideal Self, often use the expressions like 'flexibility' and 'openness' to describe how they would like to present themselves in the future. In descriptions of the Ideal Self we read in what direction people would like to develop themselves.

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364

Whoever you are, and whatever you would like to become, it will not breeze in from the open air. It is hard work. Developing an authentic personal and professional identity is work-in-progress. It helps to mirror with peers, it helps to reflect upon your behaviour and consider alternative actions, and it helps to ask for, listen to feedback from colleagues. Feedback might be conflicting with one's own opinion, it nevertheless will be stimulating and transform into new ways of behaving. All these different comments are like building blocks in the construction process of your identity. A process that takes all one's life.

## **8. Articulation of the gap**

The process of identity is not only marked by the fact that it takes a life, one of the characteristics of this process is also that it needs crisis and conflicts. 'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs', as the British theologian John Hull stated at the GERFEC conference in Budapest 2003. By that he meant that the conflict is needed in order to proceed in the process of development of an intercultural society. For this process, in his opinion, we need 'persons of faith, being faithful to our traditions, in the context of children in Europe as a whole. We ... have an interfaith mission for the humanisation of

Europe'. In order to create a human society, conflicts are useful to show clearly the starting points of every single participant in the process. Humanity and peace are sentimentalized. We should be aware of the fact that Peace is a struggle, it is hard work. You can not have peace without a conflict. Children should be introduced in the world of dilemmas, like 'my father is a soldier, he might kill a person, is that good?', and 'my father is a policeman, he might arrest somebody, is that good?' Peace education should not be isolated as a part of religious education; it should be integrated in the whole curriculum. It starts with knowing each other and comparing each other's points of view.

In the comparison of different cultures we equate what is known to what is unknown. We state something to be 'like ...', and at the same time we say that in some way it is also different. Let me give you an example of this kind of comparison in an old story from the tradition of the Digger Indians in Northern America. They tell each other this story on the topic of diversity: 'In the beginning, God gave to every people a cup, a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life. They all dipped in the same water, they all drank the same life, but their cups were different. Let us be proud of our own cup and be cautious not to break our cups'.

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365

The cups are different; the water is the common element. We categorize elements of various cultures on the base of similarities and differences. Categorizing is to be learnt in the socialization process. The language we use to express our experiences structures the categorization process and mirrors the socialization process. Any categorization is biased and limited as well as culturally bound.

It is limited because we take one or two dimensions as the starting point for the categorization, which makes us insensitive to all the other dimensions that could be at the base of classification. Sallie McFague (1982) states that we speak of A in terms of B, just because we do not know how to speak of A. Using characteristic aspects of B in order to come closer to understanding what A is, is a very open process just because it opens up the room to what A is not in comparison with B. It widens the horizon. The danger is that B as a metaphor of A becomes rigid and ends up being a frozen metaphor. This might hinder from exploring the open space of A not being B. Then it is time to look for new metaphors to break down the 'mental set' to enable us to see new aspects in a changing world, new aspects that became invisible because the old metaphor was worn out.

Bronfenbrenner states that 'there is a widespread fear ... that critical scrutiny of one's own traditions will automatically entail a form of

cultural relativism that holds all ways of life to be equally good for human beings and thereby weakens allegiance to one's own' (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 33). We consider it to be one of the main tasks of education, and a challenge to teachers in the classroom, to stimulate the development of skills to dialog with people with a different cultural and religious background. By debating, listening to the arguments of the other, opposing and agreeing, understanding, respect and tolerance grow. These qualities need to be developed to prevent people from getting their right at all costs (WRR 2003, 255).

## 9. Bridging the Gap

Humanity starts with listening to the arguments of the other and presupposes a mutual relationship. Both parties in the relationship make the choice to consider seriously the concerns of the other and not only one's own affairs (Brümmer 1993). The concerns of the other are as much valued as my own concerns, even more: they are part of my concerns. A human relationship between the different cultures and religions is characterized by mutual interest in and appreciation of the valuations and motivations of the other. Articulation of what is familiar and at the same time articulation of the uniqueness of the other strengthens both sides of the gap, which is the groundwork to bridge the gap. Value education should not be separated from the other subjects as just another subject on the schedule of the school. Value education is to be integrated in the pedagogical process in the classroom. To put it in another way: the whole schedule, including the transfer of knowledge and the development of qualities and skills, needs to be saturated with value education (WRR 2003, 256). This can be concretized in what is called 'overlapping consensus', which means that the different parties in the encounter agree on the result to be reached, without agreeing on the many motives and arguments that are at the base of each one's point of view (WRR 2003, 151). It is important to come to well-organised procedures for mastering and settling conflicts within and between groups. Sennett (1997, 3) states that 'The scene of conflict becomes a community in the sense that people learn how to relate to one another, even as they understand better and feel keenly their differences'.

In this paragraph we have described ways to bridge the gap, through value education and by mastering conflicts. In the last paragraph we will return to the point of mutual understanding.

## 10. Mind the gap

Mutual understanding, we have stated before, is the starting point for respect and tolerance. In the following story we give an example of how a gap can show up in a conversation, and the inevitability to articulate it in order to bridge the gap.

‘Two people are sitting in a room. They are both silent. Then one of them says, “Well!”. The other does not respond.

For us, as outsiders, this entire ‘conversation’ is utterly incomprehensible. ... Nevertheless, this peculiar colloquy of two persons, consisting of only one – although, to be sure, one expressively intoned – word, does make perfect sense, is fully meaningful and complete.

In order to disclose the sense and meaning of this colloquy, we must analyse it. But what is it exactly that we can subject to analysis? Whatever pains we take with the purely verbal part of the utterance, however we try to unwrap the meaning from the words, we shall still not come a single step closer to an understanding of the whole colloquy.

... What is it we lack then? We lack the ‘extra verbal context’ that made the word ‘well’ a meaningful locution for the listener. We lack what they jointly know, and what they jointly know each other knows. At the time the colloquy took place, both interlocutors looked up at the window and saw that it had begun to snow; both knew that it was already May and that it was high time for spring to come... they were both looking forward to spring and both were bitterly disappointed by the late snowfall. On this ‘jointly seen’ (snowflakes outside the window), ‘jointly known’ (the time of year – May), and ‘unanimously evaluated’ (winter wearied of, spring looked forward to) – on all this the utterance directly depends, all this is seized in its actual, living import. ... And yet all this remains without verbal specification or articulation. The snowflakes remain outside the window; the date, on the page of the calendar; the evaluation, in the psyche of the interlocutors; and nevertheless, all this is assumed in the word ‘well’ (Bakhtin, in: Carriethers 1992).

A lesson to learn from this conversation is that we have to get to know each other and the context we live in, looking at conflicting elements that can stimulate development, and at the same time focussing at what can be shared. ‘Mind the Gap’ and ‘Stand clear of the doors’, means: beware of the splitting effect of the differences in

various contexts, do not stress what separates, but look for things that are in common. The common base found in what can be shared will give opportunities to explore the differences and use them to stimulate the development of a citizen equipped for the intercultural and interreligious dialogue. In the future, starting today, we need world citizens who 'mind the gap!' 'Mind the Gap' as a positive warning: mind both sides of the gap and make the gap a stimulus in the development of religious identity. Strengthen the banks, the binding and bridging qualities in the religious identity of each child, in order to build a strong bridge.

### **Abstract**

In sociology one speaks of "building qualities" and "branding qualities". Binding refers to the competence of people who are able to bridge the gap we experience between different groups of people.

Binding people are very important for multicultural society. About ten years ago, in the Dutch multicultural society, the subject of "Spiritual and Ideological Movements" was introduced in schools. This subject plays an important role in education, in professional training as well as in primary education. In those lessons pupils and students are informed about the different religious and non-religious spiritual movements in Dutch society. The lessons aim at "the development of sensibility for the different ways in which people fulfil their spiritual needs". These lessons are part of the main targets of basic training in the Netherlands. These mention the importance of a certain attitude and behaviour of openness towards "the other" (especially towards the uniqueness of the other) and the acceptance of the values others stand for.

Education and socialisation in one's own culture as well as education and enculturation in the culture of "the other" is the main focus of this lecture. In this type of education the development of "bridging qualities" will enable the child and the student to play an important role in constructing cohesion in society. Bridging people are the ones who "mind the gap".