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When The Entire World is Pushed into the Classroom - Reflections on Communication, Interculturalism and Education and on Intercultural Education in the Danish Upper Secondary School

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Abstract: In this article intercultural education is discussed, cases from the Danish upper secondary school are analyzed, and some requirements for further development are proposed. First definitions of the concepts communication, communicative action, intercultural communication and intercultural education are given. Starting from these definitions it is argued that intercultural communication as well as intercultural education is possible. Then two cases are analyzed. Finally – in the Discussion – it is underlined that the students' metareflection on the context dependence of the knowledge construction process is a pivotal precondition for successful intercultural education.

KEYWORDS: DANISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL, COMMUNICATIVE ACTION, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION, CIVIC EDUCATION, CONTENT INTEGRATION, THE KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS, PERSONAL AUTHORITY, ACTING COMPETENCE, DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Introduction

In this article I will discuss the following three questions:

- How can we conceptualize “intercultural education”?
- How is intercultural education carried out in practice in the Danish upper secondary school?
- What are the requirements for the further development of intercultural education?

Thus, my aim is to contribute to the discussion of what intercultural education is and thereby propose a starting point for discussing how intercultural education can be implemented in the Danish upper secondary school.

In order to achieve this objective I follow this analysis strategy: First I define key concepts like ‘communication’, ‘intercultural’, ‘intercultural communication’ and ‘intercultural competence’. Having done that, I have discursively positioned myself, presented my analytical tools, and I have conceptualized the starting point for defining ‘intercultural education’. By defining ‘intercultural education’ I add more analytical tools, which makes it possible for me to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the two cases from the Danish upper secondary school, and on the basis of this analysis I discuss the requirements for the further development of intercultural education.

Thus, the article is structured as follows:

In the first section I raise the question: “Is intercultural communication possible?” Starting from an affirmative answer to this question, in the next section I raise the question: “Then, what about intercultural education?”

In the first half of the article I thereby develop the conceptual equipment needed for the examination of two cases from the Danish upper secondary school, examining the extent to which it is intercultural education. This study is conducted in the second half of the article.

My theoretical approach to the learning processes of the students in the intercultural context is sociocultural (Vygotsky 1978, Banks 2008, Lahdenperä 2011, Burchardt and Fabrin 2012), the key concepts of Banks being particularly important. My analytical approach is critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, Gee 2012). I analyze the discursive status of interculturality in the relevant curricula, and I analyze two cases focusing on how the discourse is reconceptualized in two different courses in two different upper secondary education programmes.

The data material originates from two research projects that I am currently involved in. The two research projects and the data material are presented in detail in the third section– I further present how the data material has been generated and how it will be analyzed.

Finally – in the discussion section– I consider the requirements for the further development of an intercultural education in the Danish upper secondary school including the relationship between intercultural education and civic education.

Is Intercultural Communication Possible?

First, when discussing whether intercultural communication is possible, a definition of communication is imperative. Defining communication, I rely on Habermas' theory of Communicative Action (Habermas 1996, Glebe-Møller 1996). Habermas underlines that the structure of language gives humans authority. Communicative action is possible given human capacity for rationality, and this capacity is inherent in language. In communicative action four validity claims (shared understanding, consensual truth, social appropriation, truthfulness) are presupposed and in a tacit way we take it for granted that these demands are observed by the ones we are in dialogue with. In such a counterfactual or ideal deliberative speech situation the best argument will prevail when it comes to what is truth or false (assertive speech acts) and what is right or wrong (regulative speech acts, Austin 1997), intersubjective understanding will emerge and in continuation hereof mutual emancipative action will be possible. Habermas adds that if you i.e. suspect anybody of not telling the truth in order to acquire illegitimate power you have to query the truth value of the utterance or the terms of the conclusion. If you question the truth of an utterance Habermas names it theoretical discourse, if you question the accuracy he names it practical discourse. Thus communicative action – both the dialogue and the discourse – is without coercion and a reflective corrective to means-oriented instrumental or strategic action. In communicative action man exercises authority.

Discussing intercultural communication, it is important to remember that the knowledge construction process is always culturally situated and discursively mediated (Gee 2012, Lahdenperä 2011 – cf. the reference to Banks 2008 in the next section). This implies the following point: People from different cultures, different ethnic groups, different religions and so on have different “lifeworld Discourses”¹ (Gee 2012, Habermas 1996), i.e. different ways of using language, thinking, valuing, interacting and so forth. These Discourses are developed early in life (primary

¹ Fairclough (2004) distinguishes between three levels of discourse. Discourse is language as social practice, discourse is language in a social field (e.g. the school), and in this social field you can use and privilege different discourses (e.g. a science orientated discourse or a civic citizen discourse. Fairclough adds that one discourse in a given social field can usurp hegemony (Gramsci 2011. Cf. Habermas: exercising illegitimate power). Like Fairclough Gee (2012) underlines that acting always is discursively mediated. You always act in a discourse – a unity of talking-writing-being-valuing-believing – and this discourse is always socially embedded. Discourse in this sense of the word is written with a capital D by Gee, and as far as I can see this corresponds to Fairclough's level 2 and 3. Discourse is written with a minor d when referring to language as social practice. In this article I follow the practice of Gee.

Discourses) and are further developed and changed when we acquire new Discourses in school, institutions, business or religious organizations (secondary Discourses). Thus, when people having different discursively mediated cultural backgrounds are debating theoretical questions (what is truth and what is false?) or practical/ethical questions (what is right and what is wrong?) going from the level of communicative action to theoretical or practical discourse is often needed. If you do not agree on theoretical or practical questions you have to find out

- if one or several of the participants of dialogue are trying to exercise illegitimate power or to ascribe hegemony to their Discourse
- if the participants are unable to understand each other because they are biased or colonized by the Discourse they are embedded in?

When this has been clarified they have to find the terms for discussing and solving the questions and problems.

Discussing the role of religion and religious arguments in a post-secular, post-metaphysical and democratic society Habermas (Habermas 2006, Mårtensson 2010, Rosenberg 2012) emphasises that religious people, people of faith, have the right to believe. But claiming that one's religion is right in an absolute sense is a legitimate act only if accepting that other people have the right to claim that *their* religion is right in an absolute sense. Not giving that right to others you hypostasize the vocabulary of your religion and thereby exclude others from the dialogue. You exercise illegitimate power. On the contrary, you have to accept that the addressing of political problems, values, theoretical and ethical questions in the public sphere have to be carried out in a secular language transcending the vocabulary of the different religions and have to be equally accessible to all citizens. This is of course a cognitive burden for people of faith, but a necessity in a post-metaphysical and post-secular late modern society. Taking his starting point in the mentioned structure of language, Habermas finds that this is possible.

As far as I can see, this comes true as well when we are discussing dialogue between different cultural Discourses. Thus, I reject the concept of monoculturalism as my starting point because monoculturalism only provides one horizon of understanding and acting, excludes all others and – in an illegitimate way – demands assimilation. Neither can my starting point be the concept of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism accepts different horizons, but in a value relativistic way and often leading to the hegemony of the Discourse of the majority and only offering “a tokenistic understanding of non-dominant knowledge, denigrating cultural differences to the study of samosas, saris and steel bands” (Coulby 1996. Cf. Banks level-one-approach to multicultural education, see the next section of this article). The concept of interculturalism must be my point of departure because “inter” implies the exchange between different horizons of understanding and acting (Coulby 2006, Rattansi 2011, Lahdenperä 2011) in a manner that is consistent with Habermas’

approach. Consequently, starting from Habermas' sociological and linguistic position, intercultural communication is possible.

I will add an anthropological and a sociological position – both of them more explicitly focusing on interculturalism. It concerns the positions of the Norwegian anthropologist T. H. Eriksen (1994, Eriksen and Sørheim 2004) and the English sociologist Ali Rattansi (2011).

Eriksen points out that culture makes communication possible. Culture gives you a horizon of understanding, and culture allows you to position yourself in a particular way. Culture privileges a particular way of looking at the world. But culture also mediates between the cognitive level and the societal level. Discussing with another person, you can accommodate to his culture and change your mind. In what Eriksen names a creolization process a new culture and new cultural identities will emerge in the grey area between the two cultures. So, cultures are not given once and for all, cultures are not essentialist entities, cultures are created by man, and they are constantly changing in a world characterized by cultural variation.

Eriksen states that in the globalized late modern society culture is not linked to place. Culture is out of time and space (cf. Giddens 1991). In any place there are many cultures, and man is a blend of more than one culture. Furthermore, he states that culture is not solely linked to ethnicity or religion. On the contrary he warns against ethnicification of culture. Culture could also be linked to e.g. social class, racial groups, sexual orientation, language, abilities or disabilities (cf. Banks 2008), and a blue-eyed, Christian homosexual person from Denmark maybe feels more connected to a Muslim homosexual person of Pakistani descent from the UK than to a Christian, homophobic Dane. Defining and positioning himself, his sexual orientation could be more important than his nationality.²

So, to Eriksen cultures are dynamic, and new cultures are continuously emerging. Consequently, he rejects an essentialist approach implying that each culture has a static core and that cultures cannot be mixed. To him such an essentialist approach will lead either to value relativism or to national chauvinism – both of them implying

² In Denmark (November 2012) two apparently different cases are currently discussed in the press. In less than a month it's Christmas, and the Board of a housing association – which has a Muslim majority – has decided not to buy a Christmas tree for the shared area this year. One of the Muslims members of the Board says that he is not a Christian, and he will not be in charge of lightening a Christmas tree.

At the same time elections for the parochial church councils were held. The chairman of a parochial church council in Copenhagen has tried to prevent some members of the parish from running for the council. He openly expresses that the reason is that he does not want members of the council who are against God, as he says, and pro same sex marriage. These two men are members of different ethnic groups and different religions, but when it comes to civic conduct and the conceiving of rights they do share a common idea: decisions have to be made in accordance with holy books and holy traditions. They are trying to protect these traditions and they act as their traditions were under siege (Giddens 1999, cf. note 3). In one way or another, these two persons are connected to each other.

that communication across different cultures is impossible. Nonetheless, he suggests that the concept of culture is understood starting from two metaphors: The Coral Reef and The Electrical Field. Understanding culture starting from the Coral Reef, culture is understood starting from the verb ‘being’. A culture has a – historically changeable – core. Each new generation builds on the knowledge, ideas, values, technologies, artifacts, etc. handed down through generations. Humans are created by culture. But humans are also creating culture – or the various cultures each person is part of.³ Taking that position, you are starting from the Electrical Field, and understand culture from the verb ‘doing’. In the Electrical Field the electric voltage is varying from place to place across the world, but the electric voltage can be the same in very different places. In other words: By acting in the world you are constructing your identity and your culture – and you are constructing knowledge (cf. the next section). The world is one place, but this place is locally constructed, Eriksen emphasizes, and maybe somebody far away constructs the world more or less similar to the way you construct it. Learning, knowledge construction, construction of cultures and identities are embedded in the sociocultural context (Vygotsky 1978, Lahdenperä 2011, Engeström 2012).

Thus, Eriksen underlines that cultures are created by humans and are creating humans. Eriksen even stresses that accommodation to other cultures and the creation of new cultures are possible in the context of creolization – culture is dynamic and should not be interpreted from an essentialist starting point. His conception of culture is in a manner parallel to Discourse in the sense of Gee (2012). As mentioned above, to Gee Discourses form our taken-for-granted understanding of who we are; they are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, reading and writing, and language is always embedded in Discourse. But people do change, develop or even reject Discourses. Eriksen like Gee emphasizes (Eriksen and Sørheim 2004) the fact that mastering a language is much more than knowing the vocabulary and the grammatical rules. And he even emphasizes that in a modern state having a democratic constitution dialogue is a possibility. Building on this dialogue it will – may be – be possible for different groups with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to develop an adapted and common version of e.g. the human rights (Eriksen and Sørheim 2004).

Rattansi (2011) neither refers to Habermas nor to Eriksen, but nevertheless he elaborates the position taken by Eriksen in an interesting way. He emphasizes that pivotal concepts of late modern society – e.g. democracy, scientific rationality, skepticism – emerged in the West in pre-modern time, but they also emerged elsewhere. And he points out that these concepts have been transformed in the

³ Cf. Giddens’ distinction between tradition in pre-modern societies (tradition 1) and in late modern society (tradition 2). He emphasizes that in pre-modern societies the individual was born into a tradition, but in the globalized late modern society the reflective self has to choose a tradition in each of the contexts s/he is embedded in (Giddens 1999, chapter 3).

transition from the pre-modern to the late modern society as a result of the globalization process. These concepts are not unchangeable Western concepts – Rattansi rejects essentialism and the dichotomy between what he names “the West and the rest”. Rattansi refers to Goody (2010) who even argues that “the east” has contributed to “modernization, mechanization and industrialization” and that mercantile or proto-capitalism developed in the East as well as in the West.

Rattansi’s point of view does not imply that all cultures in late modern society have been reduced to one and only one culture. Like Eriksen he claims that groups and individuals create their cultures and identities on the basis of many different variables, he underlines that cultures are mixed and are changing continuously, and he says that as a result of the way the pivotal concepts have emerged, incommensurability between cultural groups in values and meanings is gradually becoming less likely. Communication between cultures offering different horizons of understanding is possible.

Rattansi, still referring to Goody, stresses that it is important to decenter the West.

His first point concerns the pre-modern society. Skepticism against religion and divinity emerged in India in the 6th century BC (the Upanishads), tolerance to other religions and cultures emerged in Islamic Spain and in the Ottoman Empire (the millet system) and rational research was practiced in pre-modern time in, among others India and China. And there were even connectedness and borrowing between the pre-modern cultures, for instance between Hellas and India in the 5th and 4th century BC.

His second point concerns the transition from pre-modern to modern and late modern society. From his point of view governmentality, the government of populations in a systematic form, and a systematic mass and elite education are joint non-Western and Western achievements because these concepts were developed in a global context in colonial time – by the British in India. And even freedom is a post-Enlightenment concept developed in the global context. The Aristotelian concept of freedom for the free male upper class is more connected to the Confucian concept of freedom of the Mandarins than to a modern concept of freedom and democracy. Rattansi does not deny that there are differences in the way liberties and civic behavior are conceived and practiced amongst different groups, but he points out that these differences cut across the differences between ‘Christian culture’, ‘Islamic culture’, ‘Confucian culture’, etc. And so do the disagreements on the Darwinist paradigm. The above mentioned – and other – common, global experiences make the dialogue between people from different cultures possible. Rattansi concludes that it is possible to create rules for debate and resolution of controversial issues that are stable *and* left open to reasoned and reasonable challenge. It is possible to create a we-ness transcending the dichotomy between ‘them’ and ‘us’, between ‘the West’ and ‘the Rest’.

Rattansi, focusing on the mentioned concepts, stresses that the development of these concepts in pre-modern time, modern and late-modern time have to be seen in a global context. He concludes that disputes and disagreements cut across cultures

understood in the essentialist sense. A deliberative dialogue is possible. Thus, Rattansi adds a sociological and historical analysis supporting and strengthening Habermas' point: rational discourse and dialogue without coercion is possible in the global context in the late modern society.

So, it seems that Eriksen and Rattansi endorse the ideal of deliberative democracy (Eriksen 2009) – doing this they claim that rational communication oriented towards consensus is possible. Epistemic and ethical questions can be settled through public deliberations in a secular language – and in this context the best argument will prevail. In this sense public deliberations transcend illegitimate execution of power and instrumental and strategic rationality.

Through public deliberations – so is the ideal – it is possible to settle the question of how knowledge is produced and the question of how epochal core problems (Klafki 2001, cf. note 7) have to be solved. Confronting the overwhelming and global problems of today, David Coulby (2006) similarly says that it is either interculturalism or “disaster”. He adds that interculturalism should not be regarded as a school subject; it is a *perspective* in all school subjects (cf. Lahdenperä 2011).

For this reason Rattansi and Coulby – as mentioned above – prefer the concept ‘interculturalism’ to ‘multiculturalism’. They underline that the discourse of multiculturalism leads to segregation between parallel horizons of understanding, whereas the discourse of interculturalism makes integration and communication between different cultures and horizons of understanding possible. (cf. Beck and Paulsen 2011, pp. 131-155).

Starting from the interpretation of ‘communication’ and ‘intercultural communication’ developed in this section it is obvious that man (as a student, as a researcher, as a professional, as a citizen) needs ‘intercultural competence’. Being intercultural competent presupposes a cognitive and intellectual capability for understanding and reflecting on problems and sensitivity and receptiveness for the otherness (Lahdenperä 2011). Intercultural competence presupposes knowledge and willingness to engage in dialogue and mutual processes of interpretation and willingness to renounce the a priori hegemony of one's own Discourse.

If Intercultural Communication is Possible – Then, what about Intercultural Education?

Intercultural communication is possible – thus, reflection on intercultural education is needed. An intercultural education supporting the development of intercultural competence is needed. Distinguishing between intercultural communication and intercultural education we have to keep in mind that communicative action is oriented towards mutual understanding (and emancipation) while educational or pedagogical action (von Oettingen 2012) is an intentional action oriented towards facilitating the learning processes of others. The teachers reflection on pedagogical action in an intercultural context is needed.

Thus, interculturalism must be a perspective in all school subjects and in all problems based work in the school. Answering the didactic core questions (why, what, how, where, who) and facilitating the learning processes of the students the teachers have to have this in mind.

From a literacy perspective (Gee 2012), learning to read and write is to be socialized into practices of social institutions or social groups – or different school subjects. To be socialized into such practices does not only involve reading and writing. It involves interacting, thinking, valuing, believing and so on. So, Gee concludes, literacy is mastery of secondary Discourses – for instance school subjects. Gee adds that teaching can lead to acquisition and to learning. Apprenticeship implies that the teacher scaffolds the students' growing abilities to act within a given Discourse. Teaching in this way is a recommendable act from Gee's point of view, but the problem is that the result of this kind of teaching can be colonized or biased students. Thus, learning – leading to meta-knowledge – is needed. Literacy is always plural since there are many secondary Discourses, and since we all have some and fail to have others, Gee says, and as far as I can see, his point is that in a complex late modern society meta-knowledge is a precondition for personal authority. Being able to produce meta-knowledge is a precondition for intercultural communicative action e.g. in civic society and in research. It is a precondition for dialogue without coercion on epistemic and ethical questions and problems.

Meta-knowledge and reflections on different Discourses have to be part of education. The starting point for cultures and their dominant Discourses can be ethnicity, but it can be social classes, gender, religion, affiliation to a scientific discipline and so on, too. So, an education attaching importance to reflection on Discourses is an intercultural education.

Considering how such an education can be practiced I will introduce James A. Banks and his considerations of this issue, I will discuss the requirements for an intercultural education and at the end of the section I will present my core questions to the discussion of curricula, lesson plans and courses in the next section. .

Banks (2008) distinguishes between five dimensions of multicultural⁴ education and four approaches to multicultural curriculum reform.

The five dimensions are:

- Content Integration
- The Knowledge Construction Process
- An Equity Pedagogy

⁴ Banks uses the concept "multicultural" and not the concept "intercultural". But, as far as I can see, Banks' "multiculturalism" is more or less synonymous with Rattansi's "interculturalism" (cf. Lahdenperä 2011 about the use of different concepts in different countries). When referring to Banks, I use the concept "multiculturalism", else I use the concept "interculturalism". Cf. about Rattansi choosing the concept "interculturalism". I will return to the discussion about concepts in the discussion section.

- Prejudice Reduction
- An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure

In this article I primarily focus on the two first dimensions.

According to Banks a multicultural education has to reflect the fact, that the construction of knowledge is situated – discursively mediated in the sense of Gee. The starting point of knowledge construction can be implicit cultural assumptions and because of that the process can be biased.⁵ Education must reflect on this fact and discuss how knowledge is constructed when taking different Discourses as your starting point. Like Gee, Banks underlines the necessity of meta-knowledge, and like Habermas (and Rattansi) he asserts that people in theoretical or practical discourses can transcend their original Discourses and thereby create a new starting point for the knowledge construction process. Discourse and culture is simultaneously ‘being’ and ‘doing’.

This has consequences for the Content Integration. Banks emphasizes that Content Integration implies that the teachers “use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline”. Implementing the Content Integration does not mean that the teachers have to show that “they” do things in another way than “we” do. This becomes clear when Banks analyses different approaches to multicultural curriculum reform. Banks present this figure in his book:

⁵ I recommend the distinction between sociology of knowledge and philosophy of knowledge (cf. Gudem 1996, pp. 217-224). Sociology of knowledge studies how societal factors influence ways of thinking, while philosophy of knowledge addresses the conditions for knowledge production. A scholarly education must address philosophy of knowledge - what are the conditions for knowing? How can we tell what is true and false (epistemic knowledge)? and right and wrong (ethical knowledge)? - but to avoid biases sociology of knowledge has to be included.

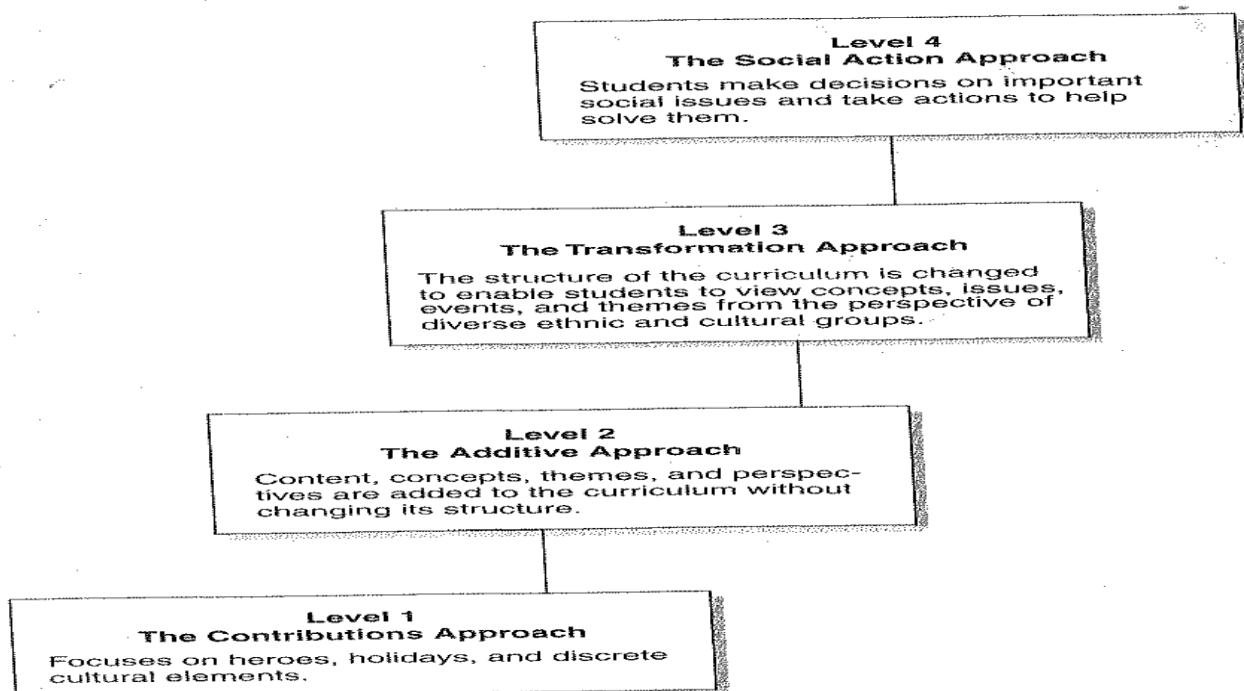


FIGURE 1

Banks' approaches to multicultural curriculum reform

Banks' point is that being on level 1 and 2, the curriculum and the education is not – using my concept – intercultural. There is no communication between people from different cultures: “They” and their horizons of understanding are just added as interesting, wretched – or maybe dangerous – “others”.⁶ So, this is to greater extent segregation than integration. In contrast, on level 3 challenging the students' conception of the proceeding of the knowledge constructions process is a focal point in the curriculum. The students have to reflect on how knowledge is constructed, and they have to reflect on how they themselves can construct knowledge in the intercultural context of the school and the school subjects. They have to be reflective and have to produce meta-knowledge. Level 4 is not in contrast to level 3. It adds a new dimension: how can students – as future citizens – address what Klafki (2001) name epochal core problems,⁷ suggest knowledge-based solutions and take action.

⁶ When it comes to “interesting”, cf. Coulby: “denigrating cultural differences to the study of samosas”. When it comes to “wretched”, I refer to the key note speak of Dr. Fran Martin from the University of Exeter at the conference in Karlstad in December 2012. She named the positive Eurocentric attitude to non-European cultures ‘care ethics’ or ‘paternalism’.

⁷ By epochal core problems Klafki understands problems of our cultural, social, political and individual existence. His examples are the peace question, the environmental question, the question about socially produced inequality, the question about interculturalism, the question about new media and the question about the I-you-relationship. Klafki points out

Thus, Banks is engaged in the question of Bildung and civic education addressing issues like:

- How can the students develop personal authority?
- How can they develop action competence?
- How can they be competent participants in a democratic society?

Using Banks' terminology the matter in hand concerns 'empowering', i.e. creating a school culture that empowers all students in the context of the school and in the future context of civil society.

As far as I can see, the complexity of the problems to solve calls for interdisciplinarity (Klausen 2011, Hobel 2009, Hobel work in progress). Interdisciplinarity is in depth integration of school subjects. The school subjects are not seen as parallel and independent entities. They are mutually dependent when it comes to discussing how knowledge is constructed and when it comes to finding solutions to the epochal core problems, but they do of course contribute with different content, different empirical data, different methods and different theories – i.e. different tools and resources. Interdisciplinarity is in a way 'subject triangulation'. Consequently the cases analyzed in this article are taken from Multi-subject Coursework, but of course relevant and interesting problems can be analyzed within the frames of one subject.

Thus, I define intercultural education by saying that a mandatory general Upper Secondary School must:

- Enable the students to develop a knowledge-based personal authority making it possible for them to develop innovative solutions⁸, to take a stance and to act accordingly
- Enable the students to develop intercultural competence
- Enable the students to be reflective, i.e. to be reflective and produce meta-knowledge on three levels:
 - Reflection on content and knowledge produced in different cultures or

that the problems are epochal: they change over time. Klafki has a descriptive and a normative approach to the core problems: these are the problems facing humanity, these are the problems discussed in the public sphere – thus, a mandatory general education must prepare the students to be able to address these problems in a knowledge-based way in the deliberative dialogue in the public sphere, in research, in companies and so forth. The core problems are not meant to be the headlines of the courses of all subjects – Klafki proposes the subjects and the courses to address the problems in a way that makes it possible for the students to open themselves to the fact that the subjects offers tools and resources usable in the problem-solving processes. He points out that the school and the teachers have to commit themselves to this. They should not commit themselves to give the "right" answers.

⁸ Following the point of view in this article innovation is to rethink and improve existing practices in an ethically justifiable manner. All person and groups concerned have to be involved and the process has to be knowledge-based. I.e. innovative solutions have to be a result of communicative action, not (only) strategic or instrumental action.

Discourses (first order reflection)

- Reflection on how the knowledge construction process differs depending on culture or Discourse (second order reflection)

- Reflection on the fact that a student has to practice first and second order reflection (third order reflection)

- Address epochal core problems and enable the students to exercise personal authority when it comes to these problems

Seen from the perspective of Giddens, the fact that we are out of time and space pushes the entire world into the classroom. This means that even though the world is constructed locally, education is not exclusively bound to tradition (tradition 1, cf. note 3) and experiences made in the local community. The truth is no longer embedded in tradition, and the radical doubt dominates the day-to-day-life. This implies that the teacher no longer can play the role of The Guardian of the Tradition. Instead s/he has to be a reflective role model for the students, i.e. to show them what it means to be a reflective self, to be reflective on the three above mentioned levels and to have personal authority.

Based on these considerations, I will ask the following three questions when analyzing two cases in the next section:

1. Is Content Integration taken into account? How and to what extent?
2. Are the question of the knowledge construction process and meta-knowledge addressed – implicitly or explicitly?
3. Do the students develop personal authority and acting competence in the intercultural sense of the word?

It is not my intention to “give marks”. On the contrary, my intention is to explore what is happening in the classroom and to provide a basis for a further discussion of intercultural education (cf. the discussion section).

Two Cases

The two cases originate from two research projects I am currently involved in. The data of the first case was generated when I participated in a research-based evaluation of “Projekt Innovationskraft og Entreprenørskab på gymnasier i Region Hovedstaden” – 2009-2012 (Project Innovation Power and Entrepreneurship in Upper Secondary School in the Region of the Capital). The case has – with another perspective – been analyzed in Hobel 2012 and Hobel & Christensen 2012. The data of the second case is derived from the research project Writing to Learn, Learning to Write running from 2010 to 2014.⁹

⁹Cf. http://sdu.dk/en/Om_SDU/Institutter_centre/lkv/Forskning/Forskningsprogrammer/fag_didaktik_laering/faglighed_og_skriftlighed.

I name these cases “critical cases” (Flyvbjerg 2010). Having summed up the findings of a critical case you can conclude: If this is (not) true for this case, it is (not) true for all cases. The first case is taken from a well-run school. My teacher informants are experienced and the topic (‘the good society’) is mandatory and needs – according to the curriculum – to be seen in a global context. It is a topic regularly being taught by the teachers at this school and across schools. The second case is in a sense even more critical. The course is part of a development project aimed at the development of action competence and global citizenship of the students.

Before presenting the two cases, I will present their curriculum-context.¹⁰ I will examine how the concepts ‘interculturalism’ and ‘interdisciplinarity’ discursively are positioned in the two curricula. And I will examine to what extent content integration is demanded and whether reflections on the knowledge construction process are demanded. Afterwards – in the next section – I will examine how the Discourses of the curricula are recontextualized in the educational practice of the schools and in the written assignments of – some of – the students.

Interculturalism and the curricula

But first I will examine the Discourses of the object clause of the programmes of the Upper Secondary School, because the curricula are accountable to this object clause. It stresses that the aim of Upper Secondary School is to prepare the students for participation in a democratic society – and to enable them to develop personal authority and action competence – in a national, European and global context. The concept ‘global context’ – but not ‘interculturalism’ – is used. When it comes to interculturalism the object clause is indistinct and vague. Does this mean transcending your values and Discourses in dialogue with others and striving for problem solving? Or does it mean understanding one’s values and Discourses in a comparative perspective?

The two cases are taken from Multi-Subject Coursework. Multi-Subject Coursework is mandatory in all the programmes of the Danish Upper Secondary School (The Gymnasium). The cases are from two different programmes: The first case is taken from The Higher Preparatory Examination (official abbreviation: HF) and the second is taken from The Gymnasium (official abbreviation: stx).

The curricula are official documents, i.e. addressing the facilitation of the learning processes of the students.

In HF the Multi-Subject Coursework is organized in two mandatory groups of subject: “The Cultural and Social Science Group of Subject” (unofficial abbreviation:

¹⁰ Cf. the website of the Danish Ministry of Education: English edition: <http://eng.uvm.dk/>.

Link to the AT-curriculum (in Danish):

<https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=132647#B9>

Link to the KUL-curriculum (in Danish):

<https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=132649#B14>

KUL) and “The Natural science group of subjects”. Three school subjects – history, social science and religious education – cooperate in KUL. The curriculum sets the topics to be addressed in each of the school subjects and in the Multi-Subject Coursework, and one of these is “the good society”.¹¹ The curriculum explicitly states that the students have to understand “the interaction between the historical, societal and cultural development in local, national and international contexts” and the options for action under these conditions. And “the encounter of cultures” has to be addressed in the instruction in each of the subjects and in the interdisciplinary problem based work of the students, and the students have to “discuss their own and others’ cultural values”. So, when it comes to content integration the using of examples and content from a variety of groups and cultures are imperative, and when it comes to the approach to the knowledge construction process, it seems reasonable to me to interpret the curriculum in this way: Even though the production of meta-knowledge is not explicitly mentioned, the students are obliged to reflect on whether or not this process is relative to cultural values. In this way we can say that the intercultural perspective is addressed in the curriculum. Discursively ‘interdisciplinarity’ in this curriculum is positioned as integration of subjects in the depth for the purpose of problem solving. ‘Interculturalism’ is positioned in the curriculum of KUL – but in an ambiguous way. One can ask: Why do the students have to “discuss their own and others’ cultural values”? Do they have to develop their communicative competence in the intercultural sense of the word? These questions are not answered in the curriculum, and neither is it possible to answer it with reference to the object clause. But in accordance with the quoted part of the object clause KUL is positioned in a citizenship-Discourse: The students have to put forward knowledge based answers to epochal core problems, but you can question if this Discourse is an intercultural version of the Discourse. My first case is taken from KUL.

Parts of the instruction in The Gymnasium are implemented as “multi-subject courses within the framework of general study preparation” (official abbreviation: AT). At regular intervals – two or three times during a year – the students are working problem based. They have to address ‘important problems’ and choose the school subjects suitable for illuminating and solving the problems. The students even have to reflect on to what degree the chosen school subjects *are* suitable for illuminating and solving the problems, and they have to reflect on the theory and methodology of the participating school subjects. So, meta-knowledge is addressed in the curriculum. But an intercultural approach to the problems are not demanded or even mentioned in the curriculum. So, when it comes to content integration there is not an *explicit* requirement in the curriculum for the using of examples and content from a variety of groups and cultures, and when it comes to the approach to the knowledge construction

¹¹ The curriculum sets five mandatory topics: Globalization and the meeting of cultures; Area Studies; creation of identity in traditional, modern and late modern societies; religious and political cleavages in a Danish or an European context; the good society.

process, it is an explicit requirement that the students have to reflect on how knowledge is constructed in different ways in different school subjects. But the intercultural dimension or perspective is not addressed in the curriculum. Discursively ‘interdisciplinarity’ in the curriculum is positioned as integration of subjects in the depth for the purpose of problem solving. ‘Interculturalism’ is not discursively positioned in the curriculum. When it comes to interculturalism the curriculum is silent. AT is primarily positioned in a study-preparation-Discourse. The students have to participate in problem based and interdisciplinary projects as a preparation for further studies on universities and university colleges. But according to the curriculum of AT the students have “to relate to the outside world and to their own development in a reflective and responsible way”. So, this wording indicates the presence of a citizenship-Discourse in the curriculum. But it is not an intercultural version of the Discourse. My second case is taken from AT.

The First Case: “The Good Society”

The first case is a course in KUL. I name the school The HF-School. The topic is “The good society”. According to the curriculum this is a mandatory topic and has to be analyzed in a global context, but no other explicit reason for choosing the topic was given by the teachers. Presenting the course to the students, the teachers did not refer to the citizenship-Discourse of the object clause and the curriculum of KUL. Even though the topic comfortably addresses most of or the entire above mentioned epochal core problems (cf. note 7) the teachers did not refer to these core problems when presenting the course – but of course: They were on the agenda in the texts read and discussed by the students. Thus, the teachers were focusing on the students’ understanding of the texts and did not explicitly address the question of the students developing communicative competence and action competence.

Ahead of the problem based project work the three teachers separately instructed the students.

The teacher of Social Science taught political ideologies (liberalism, conservatism and socialism) in a Danish (primarily) and European perspective, starting from two textbooks. In class the attitudes of various Danish political parties towards the welfare state were examined. Consequently, content integration in this course is integration of different western political ideologies or Discourses. Even though he did not use that concept the teacher emphasized how the knowledge construction process is embedded in Discourses. Your opinion on the welfare state and the distribution of goods takes its starting point from a Discourse. During the course the teacher organized three multiple choice tests examining if the students knew the meaning of pivotal concepts and examining their knowledge of factual knowledge.

The teacher of Religious Education taught pivotal Christian concepts like charity, morality and diakonia starting from texts from the Christian bible (two texts) and texts written by or referring to present-day Danish Christian authors (eight texts). Two lessons were given the headlines “We and the others” and “Islam and political Islam”

(three texts) – the headlines signaling the reading perspective. When it comes to content integration non-European others are represented – but discursively exactly *as* ‘the others’. The starting point for the knowledge constructing process seems to be *us*. During the course the teacher gave the students sheets with questions to the texts. I name these sheets ‘check- and match-sheets’. Thus, the teacher wants to be sure that the students can reproduce the key concepts and the core factual knowledge of the texts.

The starting point of the teacher of History was texts written by Luther, Machiavelli and Montesquieu and the section in the textbook about the modern Danish welfare state. I.e. the origin of the Danish welfare state is discussed in the context of European political philosophy. Content integration is integration of different European Discourses seen as starting points for the knowledge construction process. Even the history teacher gave the students ‘check- and match-sheets’.

Thus, the students were prepared for the problem based project work. The teachers handed a compendium out to the students, and taking this as their starting point they first had to formulate a problem statement and then to write a synopsis (including a problem statement, some sub-questions, conclusion of the sub-questions, a conclusion – i.e. an answer to the problem statement) for an oral examination. The topic was “The welfare state”.

The compendium (15 pages) consisted of six texts:

- A speech by the Danish Prime Minister (conservative) from 1985
- An article written by a conservative MP in 1956
- An article written by an economist in 1966
- Statistical data: Welfare spending in Denmark from 1950-2003
- An article from 2010 on the welfare state written by the managing director of “Ældre Sagen” (an organization lobbying for the interests of people over 60)
- An essay written by a Danish historian in 2002 on The Culture of Rights and The Culture of Duties and the origin of these cultures in European history of philosophy and Christianity

Four groups of students handed in a synopsis. In what follows, I will briefly examine one of these (650 words) written by my central informant (“Mette”) and her group.¹²

The problem statement of the group is: “Where is the welfare state heading?” And then they put some sub-questions, i.e. “What impact does Christianity have on our welfare society?”, “How has the welfare society developed since 1950?” and “What will the future welfare society of Denmark look like?”

Answering the sub-questions, the group gives an account of the texts from the compendium from textbooks read in the instruction courses given by the three teachers ahead of the project work.

¹² When it comes to the findings in my analysis the four synopses are alike.

E.g. the first sub-question is answered by giving an account of the sixth text in the compendium. Or rather: Highlighting two of the points in this text: “The attitude to religion has changed in Denmark since the 1950’s” and “Culture of Duty versus Culture of Rights, norms and traditions”. The second sub-question is answered by quoting facts from the textbooks, and the third is answered by stating that it depends on who wins the next election – the Liberal and the Conservative Party or the Social Democrats. The closing conclusion is in a continuous and coherent text (118 words) summing up the accounts already given.

Generally seen the teachers find that this synopsis is well-structured and on a creditable academic level.¹³ Thus, the teachers and the students have completed a negotiation: Writing a synopsis in KUL this is what you have to do. Then, what components does this agreement consist of? How are the Discourses of the curriculum recontextualized?

The objective of writing as a cultural practice in this context is to describe and to structure given knowledge. This is a continuation and prolongation of the use of writing in class, and it implies that the students are positioned as actors demonstrating that they can give an account of texts handed out by the teachers or others.

When it comes to content integration, the Discourse of the curriculum has been transformed. In the problem based project the values of other cultures almost disappeared. The course of the teacher of Religion only demonstrates an additive approach to content integration. Various Discourses or political ideologies are represented, but the perspective is Danish or European and the students adopt the additive approach (cf. Banks’ level two) to these Discourses: The additive approach implies that the knowledge construction process is not reflected. The students do not reflect on the opportunities offered by the Discourses, but instead they describe what you would do if you were a conservative, a liberal or a socialist, and they do not reflect on how knowledge is constructed within these Discourses. Further the students are silent when it comes to non-European Discourses on the good society and the welfare state. Hegemony, thus, is given to a European perspective.

This implies that even the Discourses of interculturalism and interdisciplinarity of the curriculum are transformed. There is no discussion of and reflection on the values of different cultures. The approach is additive or may be even excluding. What we see is – maybe – an unreflected naturalization of the Christian, Danish and/or European perspective on the topic. Implicitly the students are incited to elaborate on the topic within this perspective. Reflections on other perspectives are not requested and the naturalized Discourses are hypostatized. And when it comes to interdisciplinarity there is no discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the subjects when it comes to concluding in favor of a solution to a problem statement.

At the end of the day it seems like the teachers to a higher degree are trying to enable the students to structure the knowledge of the subjects and to understand

¹³ I refer to the written response given by the teachers.

central concepts of the subjects than to enable them to be empowered citizens having acting competence in the intercultural sense of the word and being able to suggest possible innovative solutions to problems. If that is correct, they are not role models in Giddens' sense of the word. But nonetheless: In an interview I asked Mette whether KUL is an appropriate and relevant subject in the school. Here is her answer:

“Yes, ... KUL... is relevant, because it gave me a lot of knowledge about how things have been, how they may be now, which allows me to be attentive when it comes to how things will be. And suddenly I can better understand what is written in the papers, or what they are saying on the radio and on television or the like. And maybe I am now even better equipped when discussing these things with my peers.”

So, when it comes to Mette and her identity she finds that she has developed some sort of communicative competence. But not in the intercultural sense of the word, and it seems like she prefers to practice out of school.

The Second Case: “Corporate Social Responsibility”

This case is a course in AT in The Gymnasium. I have analyzed this case with a different perspective in a previous edition of *Nordidactica* (Hobel 2012), and I name this gymnasium “XG”. The topic is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).¹⁴ This topic was chosen by three teachers teaching Social Science, English and Innovation respectively. According to the Social Science teacher and the English teacher the topic addresses a pivotal global problem – speaking in Klafkian (2001) terms I would say they are addressing the epochal core problem ‘social inequality’ – and they stress that by working with this topic it will be possible for the students to develop action competence in a global context. According to the website of XG enabling the students to develop action competence and communicative competence is an important objective of the school. XG values highly “a committed sense of community”, “individual diversity” according to the homepage of the school and “democratic responsibility”, i.e. interpersonal and intercultural communication and dialogue is seen as the point of departure for acting as citizens in a globalized world. XG even values cooperation with institutions, companies and schools home and abroad highly. In this particular case the teachers had organized a course which made it possible for the students to cooperate with a transnational company, having on the one hand their head office in the neighborhood of the school and on the other hand a subsidiary company in India, and to cooperate (via e-mail) with students from a high school close to the subsidiary company. As part of the course a manager from the company gave a lecture on CSR to the students, and afterwards the students, as a project, had to write a pitch to the company suggesting how it could improve the CSR-strategy of the subsidiary company in India.

¹⁴ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_social_responsibility

As mentioned above, this explicit intercultural and global perspective is not mandatory according to the curriculum of AT.

Ahead of the project work the teachers instructed the students. The Social Science teacher's starting point for the course was texts about political consumerism, texts about CSR and texts about the working environment in India. He had chosen texts written by various authors and with different perspectives on the topic.¹⁵ E.g. the perspective of a researcher studying political consumerism, a Danish trade union official and a Danish businessman leading a subsidiary company in India. The researcher defines the political consumer as a person who not only prioritizes the use-value of a product, but even cares about making the world ecologically sustainable and buys products in accordance with this objective. The trade union official is protesting against trials in India against trade union activists fighting against the violation of the rights of the workers in the textile industries. And the businessman says that you on the one hand have to be aware of cultural differences and on the other hand have to realize that you cannot "change the system". He emphasizes that you can benefit from this: the best engineers will choose to be employed in his company because of transparent management, equal rights for all employees, etc. So, the knowledge construction process was reflected, even though this concept was not used.

When it comes to content integration this course deals with an epochal core problem (social inequality and working environment) in a Danish and Indian context. It is underlined that starting from different Discourses you do produce knowledge about the problem in different ways and that the action proposed is relative to Discourse. A meta-reflective approach to this fact is offered by the teacher. But the interesting thing is that the voices heard are Western. They are talking *about* India and Indians. The course (and the entire project) has a social action approach (Banks' level four), but in a strange combination with the additive approach and not the transformative approach. The horizon of the knowledge construction process seems to be Western.

The English teacher on the one hand instructed the students how to write a pitch and how to use different modes of persuasion. On the other hand she had chosen two texts discussing CSR from different points of view. One of them is interesting in the context of this article. It is written by two American journalists reporting on Google scaling back its operations in China due to censorship – probably in order to comply with their CSR-policy. The views of different groups and persons are reported, i.e. businessmen, human rights organizations in the West and human rights activists in China. Here it becomes clear that epistemic and practical knowledge (cf. assertive and regulative speech acts) is relative to Discourse, and in this case an eastern view is involved, though the cultural background and the Discourses of the Chinese activists

¹⁵ The student did also watch some chapters from the TV-series "Blood, sweat and t-shirts". A documentary shown on Danish TV. Five youngsters from Denmark are working in the textile industry in India under the same working conditions as the local workers.

are not explicated. Here we are approaching a combination of Banks' level three and four.

The Innovation teacher introduced the students to innovative working methods and procedures.

Having been instructed in this way, the students were – as already mentioned – asked to write a pitch to the company. They had to come up with suggestions to improve the CSR-strategy of the company.

The students were working together in groups and were asked by the teachers to get “an idea” and write a pitch in English (one page) with four points:

- A title
- Which problem they have been trying to solve
- The proposed solution
- Why is this solution the best solution?

According to the Social Science teacher the students were incited to take their ethical considerations as their starting point (in my words: to privilege a citizen Discourse), on the other hand they were told to take the interests of the company as their starting point (to privilege a market Discourse). There is a high degree of interdiscursivity in the writing prompt.

The pitches written by the students were sent to the company and to the students from the Indian high school. In what follows I will briefly examine one of the pitches.

A group of four students writes: “We know that the Indian employees often don't take initiative to come up with new ideas, but if we build a comfortable working environment they might. To make a comfortable working environment, we have created a work process that will help the Indian workers get a better working environment, and make sure that they are comfortable with their work and trust the management to make the right decisions.”

The proposal is that The Human Resource Group must be a mediator between the employees and the management. The HR-Group “has to take care of the employees' need and be a sort of ‘contact person’ for them”. Furthermore the students suggest that the company offers courses for the high school teachers “to learn about the process and pass it on to their students”.

It is noteworthy that the students are suggesting compensatory action: Indian workers do not take the initiative. Thus, the students suggest that the company should take initiative. The company has to educate and enlighten the workers and the coming workers. The Indians are objectified and the company seen as the acting subject. The project is an enlightenment project.

The pitch is embedded in both of the Discourses offered by the teachers. The company is urged to embrace only the proposals from the employees that benefit themselves (the market Discourse), but the students even points out that the Indians have to be educated – to achieve the same political, economic and environmental rights as the students themselves.

To sum up:

The objective of writing as a cultural practice in this context is not to describe and to structure given knowledge. On the contrary. Taking their starting point from knowledge discussed with the teachers, the students have to define problems and to suggest possible solutions. Explorative writing is demanded by the teachers, and the challenge is taken up by the students.

When it comes to content integration the Discourse of the curriculum has been transformed. The Discourse of the curriculum is silent when it comes to content integration in an intercultural sense, but the Discourse of the teachers emphasizes the need for including content from all over the world. But when it comes to the knowledge construction process the western perspective is privileged. So, the approach seems to be additive. But nonetheless the need for social action is emphasized and the project is embedded in a citizenship Discourse.

At the end of the day, it seems that the teachers try to be role models – the objective is to enable the students to acquire action competence – but in a biased way privileging Discourses of the West.

Discussion

Two critical cases have been examined in this article. The objective has by no means been to give marks to the students or the teachers. The objective has been on the one hand to conceptualize intercultural communication and intercultural education and to discuss the need for intercultural education in late modern society and on the other hand to examine cases from the Danish upper secondary school in order to have a starting point for didactical reflections on the further development of intercultural education.

Discussing the findings it might seem remarkable that an intercultural approach to some extent is visible in the AT-case. Unlike the KUL-curriculum an intercultural approach is not required explicitly in the AT-curriculum. The intercultural approach in the case is perhaps due to the fact that this it is part of an overarching innovation project at XG promoting innovation in a global world. Thus, an intercultural approach is likely. But as indicated in this article it is worth discussing to what extent this case has an intercultural approach. No doubt that there is a social action approach – the students are responsible for identifying problems (epochal core problems – epistemic and ethical) and to propose solutions. But is the starting point an additive approach, care ethics and compensatory action? Is a Western version of the knowledge construction process privileged? Or is the starting point transcultural dialogue, communicative action and meta-reflection on different knowledge construction processes?

In the KUL-case the intercultural and social action approach seems to be absent.

The entire world is pushed into the classroom. This is an unavoidable condition in late modern society. But the cases examined indicate the classroom only responds to a

certain extent. This applies to the pedagogical action (von Oettingen 2012) of the teachers and to the problem based projects of the students. It seems to be a problem to move from an additive approach to a transformative approach and to embed a social action approach in the transformative approach. It is a finding in the article that it seems to be possible to connect the additive and the social action approach in an odd way. Content integration is maybe not the major problem – the main problem seems to be how to develop a reflective relationship to the knowledge construction processes of other cultures (Cf. Christensen in this edition of *Nordidactica*). One may wonder why this is a problem, because the teachers and the students are used to view school subjects and political ideologies as Discourses offering different ways of seeing. They are used to a meta reflective perspective. Maybe the students and the teachers are biased – embedded in Western Discourses. Maybe the problem is lack of educational materials and teaching resources.

But in late modern society a combination of self-governance and governance by others is a precondition for maintaining democracy (Christensen 2011). Self-governing citizens, citizens with personal authority are warrantors against the suspending of the deliberative democracy and against the hegemony of strategic and means-orientated action. Such citizens try to actualize the counterfactual ideal of dialogue without coercion. To prepare the students for such a democracy Civic Education is needed. In Giddens' sense the teachers have to be role models, i.e. showing the students the procedures for dialogue without coercion including theoretical discourse and practical discourse. The teachers are obliged not to privilege one Discourse and claim hegemony¹⁶ for it and not to give the canonical answers to epochal core problems. Consequently Intercultural Education is a necessary part of Civic Education – and the analysis in the first half of this article shows that such an intercultural education based on communicative action is possible. You will be non-reflective instead of empowered if the intercultural perspective – including content integration and integration of different approaches to the knowledge construction process – is not included in Civic Education. If Western Discourses are naturalized, dialogue with co-global citizens with other cultural backgrounds will end up in paternalism and care ethics.

It seems as if the students have not developed the cognitive and intellectual capability and the sensitivity and receptiveness characterizing intercultural

¹⁶ Gramsci (2011, vol. 2, pp. 210-214) advocates non-hegemonic school enabling the students to be self-governing citizens – and researchers: "There is a shift from an almost purely receptive form of learning to creative education, a shift from the school, where the discipline of studying is imposed and controlled from the outside, to a form of education in which intellectual self-discipline and moral independence are theoretically unlimited ... To discover a 'truth' by oneself, without external suggestions and prompting, is a 'creation', even if the truth is an old one; in any case, it is an entry into the intellectual phase in which new truths may be discovered because one has arrived at knowledge and discovered an old 'truth' by oneself."

competence (cf. my points in the end of the first section), and it seems as if the teachers do not facilitate an intercultural education in the strict sense of the word.

And finally, maybe ‘transculturalism’ (Beck and Paulsen 2011) is a better concept than ‘interculturalism’. The Discourse of interculturalism signals integration, understanding and interchange *between* cultures, whereas the Discourse of transculturalism signals digression, public deliberation and development of new cultures and new ways of tackling problems of any kind. The Discourse signals that social action transcending given cultures is needed.

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