

The story of the Dutch

The first time we heard about the TICKLE-project was on the closing conference of the APT-project in Offenburg. We immediately realised this could be a good opportunity to develop and get back intercultural education in the curriculum of Pabo Arnhem. In the past intercultural education had been part of the program, but during changes in the curriculum it had been minimized. We discussed our options with our board of directors and fortunately they also saw the importance of the TICKLE-project. The opening session was in Arnhem so we had to organize the first meeting. A lot of work, but we enjoyed meeting the other teams very much. Meeting the (cultures of) the other teams was for us also meeting our own culture.

In advance of the meeting we had been talking about words like culture, intercultural and multicultural. One of the discussions was also about the Dutch culture. We couldn't put our finger on our own culture: what is typical Dutch? are tulips, windmills, wooden shoes and bikes really our culture? One of us even suggested the Netherlands had lost their own culture. But after the visit of the other teams, we had learned much about ourselves. In simple aspects we noticed differences between us and the foreign teams:

- Opening the weekend with a musical activity
- Students calling their teachers by their first names
- Talking openly about being gay
- Drinking a beer in a bar together with students
- Our laws about coffee shops and prostitution are strange for foreigners
- Our focus on religion in the project

Of course we talked about our experiences after the meetings. We realised we had also seen differences between the other teams. The northern teams (Lulea and Tallinn) seemed to be more quiet and introvert. On the other hand we had experienced the eastern teams (Eger and Gyor) as more lively, but also introvert. We didn't know exactly about the French. It was difficult to communicate with them because of language barriers. The German team 'felt' a bit like ourselves, but also different. We had the idea that their hierarchy was more strict than ours. Because of these experiences we asked ourselves the question if being lively (and even a bit loud) and extravert/ straightforward is part of the Dutch culture. This was not the image we had of ourselves, but it was what we experienced.

We wondered if those characteristics told us something about our culture or about our personalities. In the process of the project this question came back to us several times. We now know it's a bit of both sides. On the one hand it is part of Dutch culture to be lively and extravert/ straightforward, but on the other hand the personalities of the three of us have these characteristics more extreme. If we had been born in another country, we would not have been the same. Realizing this, we also had to realize that it's the same for other countries. Certainly by visiting the hometowns of the other teams, we could experience how some parts of people's personality are part of their culture and how other parts are personal.

These conclusions were not new, we already knew this cognitively. We had talked about this with our lector for innovative studies, Jorg Tholke. In his work he starts from the systemic approach and U-turn of Otto Scharmer. An important aspect of this approach is being aware of and honouring the culture you live in: 'you are part of your culture, but culture is also part of you'. By 'experiencing these conclusions', we started to notice and understand them more. It made us more aware of the systems in groups and how these systems influence persons. From this social constructivistic point of view some of us felt they could help students better in understanding their personality in time and place.

In a way, we have experienced our didactical approach of intercultural education. Already in the beginning of the TICKLE-project we had chosen the ABCD-crown of I. Abram. It says if you want to be an intercultural competent teacher you have to know your autobiography (self-image) and biography (image). If you are not aware of these aspects, intercultural conflicts might increase and sometimes even explode. By meeting the other TICKLE-teams we learned more about our autobiography and biography. We now understand why we are the way we are better. It is because of the time and place we live in. Learning about the history of other countries (like the former communistic countries) made us look differently to our history.

Awareness of your autobiography and biography enables you to go into dialogue with people from other cultures. We now realize it has taken us a long time to really get into dialogue with the team members. We are used to discussions and sometimes we even stop listening just to make our own statements. It sounds perhaps strange, but ending up the TICKLE-project by writing this story made us aware of this fact. By building up a tool for dialogue, we learned ourselves to go into dialogue instead of conflict. We feel it still is difficult to change a lifetime of habits, but we also experienced the value of this change. Hopefully we succeed to stay in dialogue. Not only within our team or institute, but also with other cultures and perhaps most of all with ourselves.