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European Coordination:
Staatliches Seminar für
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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

134317-2007-DE-Comenius-CMP

THE ABCD OF INTERCULTURAL CLASSROOM EDUCATION
Ido Abram, November 2001

The following two pairs of concepts are important for the didactic elaboration of intercultural classroom education: identity-imago and dialogue-conflict. We will discuss these concepts first and subsequently introduce a model for intercultural classroom education: the ABCD crown[1].

1. Biography and autobiography
'Biography' and 'autobiography' are simple terms for the concepts of 'imago' and 'identity'. The concept of **identity** refers to awareness of personal unity and continuity, the conviction that one will essentially remain the same person despite all possible changes. It refers to the totality of characteristics, which individuals believe form their 'being', their individuality. Groups also have an identity of their own: a female identity, a male identity, a Dutch identity, a European identity, a black identity, the identity of a school, a lesbian identity, etc.

A group consists of two or more persons, who have at least one characteristic in common. This characteristic can be real as well as imaginary, perceived or attributed. Examples of groups are families, tribes, villages, societies, churches, companies and nations. Less obvious groups are people taking part in meetings, competitions, strikes, wars and revolutions. Objects such as a newspaper or a cactus also have an identity, but in this discussion we will restrict ourselves to the identity of people: individuals *and* groups.

With the identity of people, the emphasis is on the complementary nature of the life stories of people and history. That is why it is wrong to equate the term 'identity' with the question 'Who am I?' or 'Who are we?', unless we put the answers to those questions in a historical perspective. A fascinating and at the same time complicated aspect of the concept of 'identity' is that it is both intangible and omnipresent. The concept is so universal and yet so difficult to understand, because it involves a process that is 'situated' in *the soul of the individual* and at the same time also in *the soul of the culture of his community*, a process that actually determines the identity of those two entities: the identity of the individual (or the group, as we have explained earlier) and the identity of the culture of the community of which the individual (or the group) forms a part.

Modern man has multiple identities: an ethnic, a socio-cultural, a religious, a sexual, a generational and a professional identity, to name but a few. Each group has its own culture as well as its own identity. Each individual belongs to several groups and has therefore several identities. Not all groups to which a person belongs are equally important to him or her. Especially groups that can at least offer its members status (human dignity), security and help, are important to its members. Groups that are important today can lose that importance tomorrow. Other groups can become important overnight.

Instead of speaking of multiple identities, we assign one identity to each individual and to each group, in which we distinguish a number of aspects: an ethnic aspect, a socio-cultural aspect, etc. We can also refer to these aspects as 'roles'. Each individual and each group has more than one role and consequently the concept of 'identity' gets an extra dimension. First of all, it becomes dynamic by the mutual tension and interaction of those separate aspects or roles. Furthermore, it can help to explain

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[1] The *ABCD crown* is a relatively new model for intercultural education. See: Abram, I. *Het ABCD van intercultureel leren in de klas* (draft). Projectgroep ICO, Den Bosch, April 1998. In the autumn of 1994 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports set up the Intercultureel Onderwijs (intercultural education) project group to promote the realisation of intercultural education. The project group was dissolved at the end of 1998.

the ambivalence which according to some is typical of the identity of modern man. For example, an individual or a group can be progressive in cultural terms and conservative in socio-economic terms, a man can be passive and friendly as a father and decisive and hard as a manager.

What we have just said about identity (autobiography, self-image), can also be regarded from another angle, from the angle of others: we are then talking about **imago** (biography, the picture that others form of you). Individuals have both an identity and an imago. This also applies to groups. However, 'individual' and 'group' are no static objects that are not related to each other. *An actually nonsensical formulation such as 'individual *and* group' gives the impression that 'individual' and 'group' are two different things, such as table and chair, pan and lid. Groups are formed by individuals and individuals can only develop their specific human nature by means of relationships with others. We are referring to, for example, their ability to talk, think and love, which can only be developed in groups.

If we define the concepts of 'autobiography' (identity) and 'biography' (imago) at individual level once again, the reader must imagine the intertwining between individual and group himself. Simple statements such as "I am a Dutch teacher' and 'He is being bullied at school' serve to explain the intertwining referred to here. Reformulation of these concepts involves the following working definitions:

Autobiography (identity, self-image)
- How you perceive, experience and value yourself and how you express this.
- How you interpret and give meaning to your own life – from the cradle to the grave.
- Your own expectations for the future: how you link your life with the past and the future ('Who am I? Where do I come from. Where am I going?').

You find autobiographic element in your letters, conversations, the stories you tell, the photos you take, in your diaries, in drawings you make, in the clothes you wear … and in written autobiographies. Your life story can also be recorded in other ways (e.g. on video). Most autobiographic elements are never actually recorded (but they are experienced) and they are stored in our memories or forgotten. In the classroom, well-known written autobiographies (for example the diary of Anne Frank) as well as autobiographic details of political movements and of the pupils and the teachers are important; in primary education the autobiographic details of the parents are important as well.

Biography (imago, the picture that others form of you)
- How others perceive, experience and value you and how they express this.
- How others interpret and give meaning to your life.
- What others expect from your future: how others link your life with the past and the future.

Biographic elements are found in the way in which others talk about you and portray you.
In the classroom, the biographies of famous people and political movements as well as the biographic details of the pupils and the teachers are important; in primary education the biographic details of the parents are important as well.

Autobiographic sources (photographs, letters, etc.) are often used in biographies. And the opposite also applies. The self-image is influenced by the way in which others perceive you. The general point is this: identity and imago overlap but they never converge completely. Here and below 'overlap' does not only mean that there are common elements, but also that these elements interact with and influence each other.

There is a tension between identity and imago, between autobiography and biography. This field of tension has two poles: a positive (constructive) pole and a negative (destructive) pole. We use the term 'dialogue' for the positive force and 'conflict' for the negative force.
2. Dialogue and conflict

Identity (autobiography) and imago (biography) are two types of images which we have to take equally seriously and examine equally carefully. This may seem obvious, but it rarely happens. Identity and imago are usually not regarded as two perspectives and forms of expression, which should both be given an equal opportunity to demonstrate their value and their right. The right 'climate' is often lacking for such change of perspective. We can only get to know ourselves in two ways in a climate of safety and confidence: through ourselves and through others, by means of our own eyes and by means of

the eyes of others. The **Johari Window**, named after the social psychologists Joe Luft en Harry Ingham, can be used to illustrate this process of dialogue. This model (figure 1) illustrates how people perceive, experience and value themselves and how they express this and how they are perceived, experienced and valued by others and how they express this. The model also shows the discrepancy between the two angles.

Figure 1: **Johari Window**

Known to self (or own groups)

		Yes	No
Known to others (or other groups)	Yes	Area of free activity *(open ruimte)*	Blind area *(blinde vlek)*
	No	Avoided or hidden area *(privé- domein)*	Area of unknown activity *(onbekend gebied)*

In a climate of safety and trust, the area of free activity can grow and the avoided or hidden area and the blind area can be reduced by means of dialogue. Dialogue will probably not affect the area of unknown activity and if it does, this will remain unknown. This process is illustrated by figure 2.

Figure 2: **The outcome of dialogue**
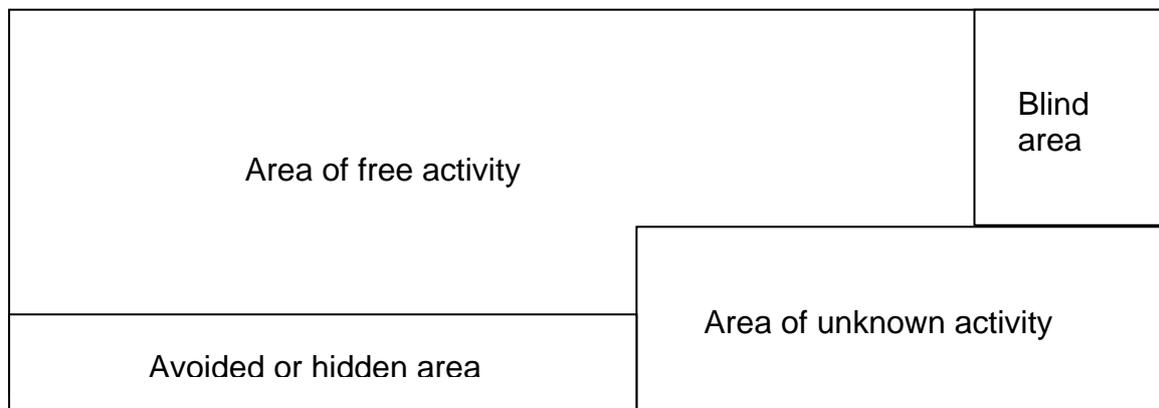
Unfortunately such a peaceful climate is a rare phenomenon although it does occur
in certain situation and at certain times. Violence is a structural phenomenon in one in two families and discrimination and bullying occurs in all schools. Besides people who protect us and provide us with security and trust, there are usually other people as well: our rivals, people who want to obstruct our activities, groups that want to harm us or even people who want to kill us. If we feel threatened by others, we are neither able nor prepared to learn a great deal from them. In that situation, we need all our energy to ignore, avoid or combat these people, 'our enemies'.

> We now define **dialogue** and **conflict** as two-sided or multi-sided interaction processes that take place
> - between individuals;
> - between the individual and the group (and the products of its culture);
> - between groups (and the products of their culture);
>
> but also
> - within the individual (introspection);
> - within the group (and aspects of the group culture).
>
> A conflict results in winners and losers. A dialogue, however, only results in winners.

Dialogue, as used here, can involve more than two parties or only one party (yourself or your own group). In the latter case, some prefer to use the term 'meeting' rather than 'dialogue' to express that non-verbal behaviour is at least as important as verbal behaviour. Of course, it is also possible to have a conflict with yourself or your own group or many others. Dialogue and conflict overlap, like biography and autobiography do. Dialogue is not always sweet and peaceful, it can also be critical and harsh. Conflicts and confrontations often precede collaboration and acceptance, but they can also get out of hand. Unequal power relations usually involve conflicts, although dialogue can nevertheless take place in such an asymmetrical relationship.

We can distinguish many forms of dialogue and conflict. Here we will restrict ourselves to four forms of dialogue (D1 to D4) and five forms of conflict (C1 to C5), knowing that each of these forms can be subdivided into subcategories.

The following forms of dialogue are all important.

> D1. *Empathic dialogue*:
> - put yourself in the position of other people and other situations;
> - change perspective.
> D2. *Autonomous dialogue*:
> - reflection;
> - self-determination;
> - do not indiscriminately follow the majority (nonconformism).
> D3. *Democratic dialogue*:
> - look for consensus;
> - enter into compromises;
> - admit mistakes.
> D4. *Creative dialogue*:
> - dare to make mistakes;
> - take new paths;
>   do not shrink away from the unknown and the unpredictable.

Dialogue involves specific knowledge as well as an open attitude and awareness of differences in perception. Dialogue is neither mealy-mouthed nor noncommittal. It can be sharp and to the point.

We distinguish five categories of conflicts, ranging from small to large-scale and from confusing to murderous.

> C1. *Dilemma, paradox, prejudice, disapproving/ facetious use of language.*
> C2. *Evade, ignore, avoid.*
> C3. *Discriminate, torment, tease.*
> C4. *Physical violence, attacks.*
> C5. *Murder, lynch, pogroms, genocide, war.*

Not all conflicts can be resolved. Conflicts are often blurred by the fact that social problems are culturalised or individualised. No attention or respect for pupils can lead to conflicts as well as an unsafe clime at school. Immigrant parents are often concerned that their children become alienated from their 'own culture'. Opportunities for parent involvement can remove or decrease that concern. Dominance of majority groups and discrimination of minority groups, as well as forced integration of migrants cause tensions. That also applies to the absence of a relationship based on mutual trust between teachers and pupils. Ignoring the identity of pupils from minority groups leads to

stigmatisation, because this means that their personal identity is replaced with the usually negative image of these pupils. Dominant teachers are only very rarely aware of this. Just as identity and imago, dialogue and conflict overlap, but they rarely fully converge.

3.The ABCD crown, a model for intercultural education in the classroom

Human perceptions play a crucial role in learning processes as well as in educational learning processes, i.e. learning processes involving education. We have already mentioned the influence teachers' perceptions have on their way of teaching. However, this influence goes much further. Human perceptions influence all processes of interpersonal interaction as well as all not purely biological processes of interpersonal interaction, like reflection for example. Human perceptions involve answers to the question "What is Man?' and, according to one of the most important 'pre-modern' philosophers, no question is more important than this one. If we consider the field of philosophy in a cosmopolitan or multicultural way, its scope can, according to Immanuel Kant, be reduced to the following four questions:
1.What can I know?
2.What do I have to do?
3.What can I hope for?
4.*What is Man?*
According to Kant, the answer to the first question is metaphysics (nowadays we would say science), the answer to the second question is ethics, the answer to the third question is religion and the answer to the fourth question is anthropology. But anthropology really comprises the three other disciplines because, according to Kant, the answer to the last question includes the answers the first three questions.

Countless multiform and sometimes contradicting answers have been given to the question 'What is Man?' What is the nature of a creature that is characterised by such an enormous personal and cultural diversity? All we wish to say about the nature of Man is that Man is an interactive being. This is expressed by the categories of 'dialogue' and 'conflict'. Man is body, psyche, culture and relates to these. He does not coincide with himself, he can look at himself through someone else's eyes, he needs others to be himself. That is why we distinguish the two perspectives of 'biography' (imago) and 'autobiography' (identity), which can complement, correct, compete with, ignore and dominate each other. This field of tension is the basis for countless human possibilities, including ethnocentrism and racism, but also openness to other cultures. In this field of tension we place intercultural education, which aims to channel this tension towards openness. Thus we arrive at the following model.

Figure 3: **The ABCD crown, a model for intercultural education in the classroom.**

Klas = classroom
A = autobiography (identity)
B = biography (imago)
C = conflict (confrontation)
D = dialogue (meeting)

The four triangles in the figure overlap, i.e. 'dialogue',
 'conflict', 'autobiography' and 'biography' overlap,
influence and interact.
Any autobiographic or biographic life story shows that
it always involves conflict and dialogue.
The one is not separate from the other (three).
When we say A, we must also mention B,C and D;
 when we speak of B, A, C and D are there in the
background, etc. In other words, the four triangles
are mutually dependent
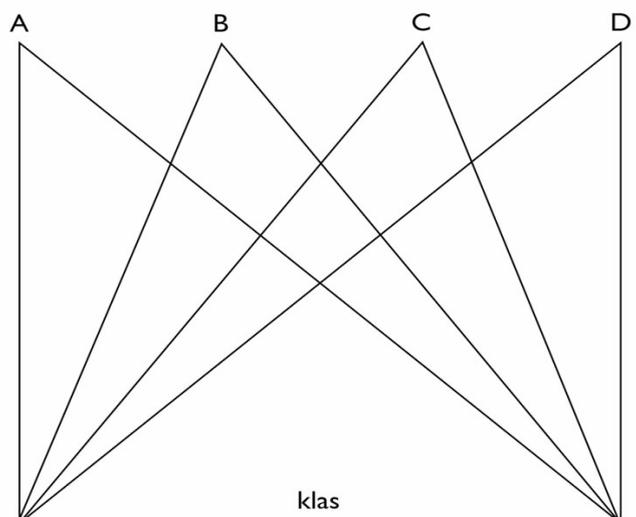
A = autobiografie (identiteit)
B = biografie (imago)
C = conflict (confrontatie)
D = dialoog (ontmoeting)

Intercultural education in the classroom means using classroom situations in which there is a place for the life stories (autobiographies and biographies) of the actors (persons involved), in which dialogue is more rewarding than conflict, conflicts are recognised and not ignored and where possible transformed into forms of dialogue.

The ABCD crown is also suitable for intercultural education outside the classroom. The basis of the crown, i.e. classroom, can be extended to 'classroom, school, environment', or a micro-level (the classroom), a meso-level (the school) and a macro-level (society). At those different levels the different actors are important and as a result of that the four concepts A, B, C and D will be interpreted differently. In a way, the ABCD crown can be regarded as a general model for education and communication.

Compiled by :
Henk Boer, Bernadette Tijnagel, Gerbert Sipman – TICKLE Group PABO Arnhem