

# Negotiation/conflict mediation

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Negotiation in this text is seen as negotiation of identity, and identity is defined as cultural or ethnic identity.

A definition of ethnic identity that can be used here is provided by Giles and Coupland (1991: 105) who define social identity as: This knowledge of our category memberships, together with the values (positive or negative) attached to them, is defined as our social identity and has meaning only in social comparison with other relevant groups.

I will pay special attention to the word comparison. Ethnic identity is here defined by the contrast of equality on the one and differences on the other hand or in other words: ethnic identity is a matter of the position between us vs. them. The difference between ethnic groups can be seen from two perspectives:

- Dichotomizing/contrast is the foundation for the creation of group identity and the borders between us and them (e.g. us: Danish, Christian, Danish speaking, democrats >< them, heathen, alien, foreign speaking, garlic eating).
- Complementarizing is the position that we are all the same. All people have the same elements like a history, a territory, folk music etc. (Eidheim, 1977)

Dichotomizing is the position of differences while complementarizing is the position of equality. Eidheim points out that both positions are necessary to create a stable group identity. From this point of view the aim of the negotiation is neither dichotomizing nor complementarizing, but both. In the matter of negotiation between teachers and parents we must therefore find some tools to create a mutual understanding and adjustment despite differences.

The following competencies and skills will be dealt with in this text:

**Competencies:** to negotiate identity in an intercultural communication and to create a mutual understanding and adjustment through the negotiation. A negotiation which includes both the participants' differences and equalities.

**Skills:**

- To analyze dialogues between ethnic groups
- To observe negotiation, differences and conflicts.
- To adjust subject and language to the interlocutor.
- To participate in a partnership across ethnic groups and cultures.

## Analyzing negotiation

I will take my starting point in a Danish paper about intercultural dialogue (Iben Jensen 2001, 2002). Jensen presents four dimensions in the intercultural communication.

**Positions of experiences** The concept of 'Positions of experiences' refers to the fact that all interpretations are founded in individual experiences, but although the experiences are subjective, they are related to the social position of a person.

**Cultural presuppositions**

'Cultural presuppositions' refer to knowledge, experience, feelings and opinions we have towards categories of people that we do not regard as members of the cultural communities that we identify ourselves with.

**Cultural self-perception**

'Cultural self-perception' is the way in which an actor expresses a cultural community as the one he or she identifies with. **Cultural fixpoints** 'Cultural fixpoints' are the focal points that arise in the communication between two actors who both feel they represent a certain topic. For a topic to be seen as a 'Cultural fixpoint' it requires that both actors identify with this topic,

and that they position themselves in a discussion. Cultural fixpoints are not entirely arbitrary, but they relate to societal structures. (Jensen 2002). The fixpoints are often the cause of conflicts in an intercultural dialogue. In practise the four dimensions can be used for analyzing a dialogue between parents and teachers and for arising the students' or the teachers' awareness of an intercultural communication and reflect upon it from a new perspective.