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**Witte, Arnd & Harden, Theo (eds.) (2010), *Intercultural Competence: Concepts, Challenges, Evaluations*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011. ISBN 978-3-0343-0793-2. 487 Seiten. 62,90 Euro.**

The book *Intercultural Competence: Concepts, Challenges, Evaluations*, edited by Witte and Harden, is a selection of twenty-seven papers that were presented at an international conference of same name, held at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, in September 2010. The collection contains a diverse range of contributions that share a common concern with the nature and acquisition of intercultural competence from a range of different theoretical perspectives and, in the case of reports on empirically based investigations, diverse contexts of application. Edited collections, however, particularly those which are based on conference presentations, constitute a rather difficult genre as the contributions might be quite disparate. This is not the case for Witte and Harden's publication who identify in the introduction a central message that the book conveys, and four common themes - 'theoretical perspectives', 'institutional contexts', 'target cultures' and the 'role of literature' - that tie the chapters together. To them, intercultural competence is a very important educational concept, but at the same time diffuse, ambiguous and often used without conceptual clarification. The editors make their position clear: they refute, in the first instance, the structuralist and essentialist idea of a set of national cultural traits and values bound up with a specific, allegedly unchanging, language. Instead, they emphasize the performative character of meaning-making processes: culture is defined here not in terms of what it supposedly *is* but by what it *does* (see Street 1993: 23), a view that runs through the entire volume. Intercultural competence is broadly envisaged as the ability to negotiate a *third space* for oneself, a spatial metaphor that draws attention to the ongoing processes of negotiation, translation, reflection and enunciation that characterize the engagement with different languages, discourses, social practices and values. This view goes beyond pragmatic and rather narrow definitions of intercultural competence as the ability to get things done in highly diverse contexts, and involves the whole person, including one's habits and habitus, biographical background, and experiences, values and attitudes. Intercultural competence can therefore not be described in a universally valid manner but is highly dependent on the contexts and participants involved. As a result, Witte and Harden stress the need for empirical investigations on the actual performance of real-world speakers in real-world contexts and situations. Many of the empirical studies in this collection reflect this commitment.

Following the introduction, the first section (*Intercultural Competence: The Broader Picture*) includes four sub-chapters that discuss the concept of intercultural competence from a variety of theoretical angles. Byram, for instance, in his particularly well-argued piece, differentiates between research on intercultural competence that seeks explanations in terms of cause and effect with a practical, hermeneutic interest, and advocacy-based research that ultimately aims to show the benefits of particular interventions. Deardorff engages with the practical implications of including intercultural competence into the foreign language curriculum, while Müller-Pelzer's and Witte & Harden's contributions add more depth to the argument that intercultural competence cannot be seen as a readily applicable qualification but includes the development of the whole person in relation to particular contexts.

The title of the second part - *Intercultural Competence and Institutional Teaching* - exposes a broad thematic range reflected in its nine contributions. Peiser begins with a discussion about the potential effects (or lack thereof) of integrating intercultural competence as a goal into the school curriculum. Both she and Costa Afonso, the author of the following paper, stress that it is ultimately the teacher and his/her intercultural awareness that has the greatest impact upon the development of this ability in students. Related to this is Zojer's argument about the generational differences between educators who attempt to foster intercultural learning through the use of traditional print media while their students already inhabit a digitalized hybrid world, but need assistance in learning to distinguish between and make selective use of the available information. The question of how to integrate intercultural elements into

teaching is also at the centre of the following chapters. While Borghetti develops a taxonomy of principles that can help teachers prepare courses aiming to increase intercultural competence, Richards, Conway, Roskvist & Harvey present a framework for analyzing classroom data in order to evaluate whether teachers actually offer students opportunities to enhance their intercultural awareness. The remaining articles in this section are not as closely thematically related. Georgiou focuses on the need to include an intercultural element in English writing courses; Weber and Domingo describe the significance and reality of intercultural education in South Africa; and Roskvist et al. ask whether immersion programmes for teachers have an effect on students' language learning, cultural knowledge and intercultural competence.

The third section explores the concept of intercultural competence in relation to target cultures. Contributions include empirical studies about the acquisition of linguistic and intercultural competence by students in study-abroad programmes (Brogan and Laoire), the pragmalinguistic ability of a group of German professionals to express disagreement in English (Mallon-Gerland), and the development of intercultural awareness through a tandem project (Furlong and Kennedy). Personal narratives are followed in the papers by Gervais, who explores the culturally mediated domains of food and hospitality and uses her insights to explore the nature of interculturality at the crossroads of embracing and rejecting otherness, and by Philburns, who draws upon his experience of living abroad and struggling with different communication patterns in his elaboration of Goffman's concept of 'sociable selfhood'. More theoretical discussions are offered by Ambadiang and García Parejo, who describe the conceptualization of intercultural competence as *solid* versus *liquid* (Bauman 2000). The authors align themselves with the argument that successful communication requires above all interactional (*liquid*) competence and not just cultural (*solid*) content knowledge. At the same time, they stress that the continued existence of intercultural communication difficulties shows that societies and cultures might not have become as liquid as many have assumed, a refreshing view in the context of a discourse community which tends to overuse *en vogue* metaphors.

The role of literature in the development of intercultural competence is the focus of the fourth and last section of the book. Grimm, for instance, exemplifies how a fable (in this case by Rafik Schami) can be employed to enhance empathy and recognition in students. Goetz-Stankiewicz's analysis of two short plays by Václav Havel, written under dramatically different circumstances, draws attention to the often neglected historical dimension of cultural meaning-making processes. Her very insightful discussion shows the merit of this edited collection as a whole: instead of presenting streamlined, state-of-the-art articles, many authors explore new theoretical, methodological and pedagogical areas related to the acquisition and development of intercultural awareness and competence, and as a result of this quality and heterogeneity, the edited volume makes an important contribution to the field of intercultural research and education.

## References

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