The theory and practice of intercultural learning have been under continuous development. This chapter explains how intercultural learning and its related concepts are constantly being questioned, redefined and developed to respond to a changing world.

RELATED CONCEPTS AND INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES

The field of intercultural studies was defined initially by a focus on intercultural communication, especially in business-related research and training. This was not without consequences, as it implied the use of constructs that allowed authors to make generalisations about a given “culture” (a group, nation or state) without too much concern for social and political aspects or the inner diversity of a culture and its fluidity.

International organisations, however, did not focus on intercultural communication, but rather on addressing and promoting cultural diversity, on developing intercultural learning (in the non-formal sector) and intercultural education (in the formal sector) and, more recently, on promoting intercultural dialogue. Lately, both academia and international organisations have been looking at the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes developed through intercultural learning/education as a coherent set of competences.

A brief overview of these concepts and perspectives is presented below.

In the early and mid-20th century, scholars such as Georg Simmel, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Ivan Illich and others laid the groundwork for understanding key intercultural issues. It was Edward T. Hall’s work, *The Silent Language* (1959), that marked the start of intercultural studies, not least because Hall makes explicit use of the phrase “intercultural communication”.

As the field became more and more popular, scholars developed new ways of understanding, analysing and representing intercultural realities. Priscilla Rogers and Joo-Seng Tan (2008) reviewed key scholarly work on intercultural communication and proposed a way to bridge the main approaches as a continuum of perspectives. They suggest that Hall (1959, 1966), Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Schwartz (1999), and Earley and Ang (2003) represent different but overlapping perspectives, as illustrated in the following table. It is worth noting that the best-known literature in this field in the last 40 years has focused on the workplace and business relations.
### Table 1: Perspectives and related constructs of intercultural scholars

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<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Perspectives</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **Schwartz**         | **Universal**                         | Values flowing from humans’ most basic needs  
He identified a set of shared values that have similar meanings across cultures. They are considered to reflect different solutions that societies find for the problems of human activities.  
- Conservatism vs Autonomy – An emphasis on the maintenance of the status quo or on creativity and positive experiences  
- Hierarchy vs Egalitarianism – Unequal distribution of power or commitment to promoting the welfare of others  
- Mastery vs Harmony – Exploiting the world for personal interests or fitting harmoniously into the environment |
| **Hofstede**         | **National**                          | Cultural differences among nations as seen in societal systems and collective values  
He identified a set of cultural dimensions specific to different nations.  
- High vs Low Power Distance – Expectations regarding equal rights or differences in the level of power  
- Individualism vs Collectivism – Stand up for oneself or act predominantly as a member of a group  
- Masculinity vs Femininity – Appreciation of competitiveness and material possessions or of relationships and quality of life  
- High vs Low Uncertainty Avoidance – Preference for rules and structure or flexibility and risk orientation  
- Long-term vs Short-term Orientation – The importance attached to future versus past and present |
| **Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner** | **Organisational**                     | Adaptation in business contexts through awareness of intercultural differences and self-examination  
They identified how national differences may play out in the business environment.  
- Universalism vs Particularism – Focus on rules or relationships  
- Community vs Individual – Function in a group or as individuals  
- Neutral vs Affective Emotion – Display or hide emotions  
- Diffuse vs Specific – Responsibility specifically assigned or diffusely accepted  
- Achievement vs Ascription – Need to prove oneself to receive status or status is given  
- Sequential vs Synchronic – Doing one thing at a time or several things at once  
- Internal vs External Orientation – Control the environment or be controlled by it |
| **Hall**             | **Interpersonal**                      | Individual behaviours and the hidden cultural roles governing them  
He focused on interpersonal aspects of intercultural communication and identified two dimensions of culture that characterise the way individuals interact.  
- High vs Low Context – Communicating minimal information and relying on implicit aspects or including more information to make the meaning clear  
- Monochronic vs Polychronic Time Orientation – Rigid focus on one task at a time or focus on interpersonal relations with little concern for time |
| **Earley and Ang**   | **Intrapersonal**                      | Cognition and motivation influencing the individual’s reaction to social situations  
They introduced the concept of cultural intelligence as the capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts and proposed four categories.  
- Cognition – Knowledge about cultures  
- Metacognition – Ability to piece together the available information to form a coherent picture  
- Motivation – Desire to engage in and learn about cross-cultural relations  
- Behaviour – Appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions in interactions with people from different cultures |

Source: Rogers and Tan (2008). Adapted by Oana Nestian Sandu
At the international institutional level, the focus was on addressing and promoting cultural diversity. The United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union drew up declarations, conventions and treaties addressing cultural diversity and committed to promoting and safeguarding diversity by investing resources in programmes and research on intercultural learning/education and, more recently, intercultural dialogue.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO 2002), together with the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO 2005), offer a legal framework for recognising cultural diversity as a “common heritage of humanity”, to be safeguarded as an inseparable dimension of respecting human dignity.

At the European level, the Council of Europe’s Declaration on cultural diversity (Council of Europe 2000a), adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2000, promotes the coexistence and exchange of culturally different practices and addresses the provision and consumption of culturally different services and products. It states that cultural diversity cannot be affirmed without the conditions for free creative expression and freedom of information existing in all forms of cultural exchange. Along these lines, the European Union’s Consolidated Version of the Treaty Establishing the European Community states, in its Article 151, that the European Union takes cultural aspects of policies into account, “in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures”.

An institutional legitimisation of the intercultural dimension in education came from the 1996 Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (“Learning: the treasure within”; Delors 1996). The report includes as one of its four educational pillars “learning to live together”, focusing on developing an understanding of others through dialogue leading to empathy, respect and appreciation. It states that education should focus on the discovery of other people, promoting an awareness of the similarities and interdependence of all people and should encourage involvement in common projects. Therefore, “learning to live together” is not a negligible contingency that education providers and educators may disregard at will; it is a human necessity. An adequate curriculum for learning to live together ought therefore to enhance: (a) learners’ participation, (b) the coherence between the group’s goals and its action, (c) the unfolding of learners’ potentials, and (d) the learners’ awareness of themselves as well as of the dynamics of their immediate and remote communities (Scatolini, Van Maele and Bartholomé 2010).

According to Leclercq (2002: 3), “Intercultural education is not so much a matter of teaching something different, but more of teaching differently within the existing curricula”.

In 2007, UNESCO published the Guidelines for Intercultural Education (UNESCO 2007), a practical resource for educators, learners, policy makers and community members, which views intercultural education as “a response to the challenge to provide quality education for all”. It promotes three main principles of intercultural education.

1. Intercultural education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all.
2. Intercultural education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society.
3. Intercultural education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations.

The new millennium brought with it a wider focus on intercultural dialogue. “The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue ‘Living together as equals in dignity’”, launched by the Council of Europe in 2008, defines intercultural dialogue as “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect” (Council of Europe 2008b). The White Paper states that the learning and teaching of intercultural competence is essential for democratic culture and social cohesion.

This perspective was further elaborated by the Platform for Intercultural Europe in “The Rainbow Paper – Intercultural Dialogue: from practice to policy and back” (Platform for Intercultural Europe 2008), where intercultural dialogue is defined as:

a series of specific encounters, anchored in real space and time between individuals and/or groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, with the aim of exploring, testing and increasing understanding, awareness, empathy, and respect. The ultimate purpose of Intercultural Dialogue is to create a cooperative and willing environment for overcoming political and social tensions.

In the same year, the Council of Europe and the European Commission started the Intercultural Cities Programme\(^2\) to promote strategies and policies to help cities work with diversity as a positive factor. Intercultural cities are cities that

have a diverse population including people with different nationalities and origins, and with different languages or religions/beliefs. Most citizens regard diversity as a resource not a problem and accept that all cultures change as they encounter each other in the public arena. The city officials publicly advocate respect for diversity and a pluralistic city identity. The city actively combats prejudice and discrimination and ensures equal opportunities for all by adapting its governance structures, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population, without compromising the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

More recently, the concept of intercultural competence has become prevalent. According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009: 7)

intercultural competence is the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientation to the world … Groups do not interact – individuals interact … The extent to which individuals manifest aspects of, or are influenced by, their group or cultural affiliations and characteristics is what makes an interaction an intercultural process.

The Council of Europe developed a model entitled Competences for Democratic Culture\(^3\) to help educational systems prepare learners to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies. The competences described in the model are teachable, learnable and assessable and are grouped into four categories: values, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding, and skills. Intercultural education is viewed as being of central importance to democratic processes within culturally diverse societies.

Regarding youth work, European institutions have developed over the years various campaigns, programmes, tools and resources to promote intercultural learning, intercultural dialogue and intercultural competences. The Youth Department of the Council of Europe has put intercultural learning, along with human rights education, at the core of its activities, especially in the youth activities at the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest. The publication of the first edition of the intercultural learning T-Kit in 2000 has been of great support in the implementation of study sessions and youth activities in general. The campaign “All different – all equal” and the No Hate Speech Movement have also underlined the value of intercultural dialogue as a tool to combat discrimination and racism.

The European Commission’s SALTO Cultural Diversity Resource Centre\(^4\) (previously known as Anti-Racism and Tolerance) collects and disseminates tools, methods, materials and resources for youth leaders across Europe. In 2012, an “Intercultural Competence Research Report”\(^5\) was published to:

provide more adequate support to youth workers and youth leaders in making the development of Intercultural Competence central in their work and going beyond the traditional way of looking at culture as a static concept, but moving towards a multifaceted concept of cultures where the dynamics and nuances sometimes become predominant and essential in daily interactions and not only in youth activities.

In 2015, the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the field of youth published the “Guidelines for intercultural dialogue in non-formal learning/education activities” (Council of Europe/European Union 2014), a tool to support organisers, trainers and facilitators of youth activities to consciously address intercultural dialogue in their projects.

The focus on intercultural relations, both at international level and at local level, is growing, but it is still far from being mainstream. Both research and practice call for more opportunities for intercultural dialogue, for including intercultural learning as a transversal approach in all areas of education and for developing young people’s intercultural competence as a response to diverse and interconnected societies. The following section discusses some of the changes in our societies for which intercultural learning can be a powerful tool.

**INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND CURRENT REALITIES**

Intercultural learning as a concept, and even more as a practice or process, is not isolated. It is linked to our realities, to societal changes, politics, economic development, justice, human rights, education, ecology, health and biology, globalisation and so on. In fact, intercultural learning can intersect with all areas in which human beings interact.

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Since the first edition of the *T-Kit on intercultural learning* was published in 2000 the world has changed; it will have changed even further by the time this edition is published, and will continue to change ever more after. This section proposes to look at some of the current realities in Europe and the world in relation to intercultural learning.

**The online world**

The online world has created more opportunities for intercultural learning, but also more opportunity for using offensive language in an anonymous way. While people from different parts of the world can connect instantly, can learn from each other and stand up for common causes, the online world also brings the risk of hate speech and of facilitating the spread of stereotypes and prejudices.

Social media companies are developing ways to automatically identify and block hateful posts and to allow users to report them. However, the impact of these moves is very limited, as they do not address the core problems. Intercultural education, on the other hand, is a useful tool for changing attitudes, breaking stereotypes, providing counter-narratives and online training for combating hate speech, and promoting intercultural dialogue. For example, the No Hate Speech Movement\(^6\) provides educators and trainers with tools to reduce the levels of acceptance of hate speech and intolerance at local and international level.

**The threat of terrorism**

It may be too simplistic to classify the world into “pre-9/11” and “post-9/11” eras. However, since the publication of the first *T-Kit on intercultural learning*, and since the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 on the Twin Towers in New York, the work on culture and intercultural learning has taken different directions. For many, the attacks were seen as an attack on social, political and religious values, as well as on the values of freedom, democracy and human rights.

Since then, terror attacks have become almost daily news, affecting all parts of the world. The profiles of perpetrators, as well as their apparent motives, vary from one case to the other. What is defined as a terror attack in the media is not always clear. Although some attacks may appear at the outset to be similar in motive and/or deed, some of these atrocities may be labelled as terror attacks while others are defined as random assaults by mentally disturbed individuals.

However, the prevalence of attacks claimed by Islamic extremists has led to a rise in Islamophobia. Without a good understanding of different groups and without information, some people may not distinguish between radical groups who claim they act in the name of Islam and individuals who identify as Muslims and have no link whatsoever with these groups. In the same way, the media play an important role in shaping the “image of fear” by embodying the profile of “the terrorist” in a certain way or choosing different wording for violent attacks, depending on who committed them. This generates a global bias, which dangerously contributes to further developing prejudice and generalisations. As a consequence, intercultural learning has most recently focused more on combating Islamophobia and bringing together young Muslims and non-Muslims.

However, intercultural learning is more than just a tool for combating radicalisation and preventing terrorism. The danger of linking these matters lies in taking simplistic shortcuts between “culture” and “violence”. Responding to terror through intercultural learning could imply that terrorism is directly linked to culture or to a certain group of people, which by itself is discriminating, and can lead to the opposite of what intercultural learning aims to do.\(^7\) In a similar way, after some recent terror attacks, some mainstream media concentrated on images showing Muslim people helping victims or demonstrating against Daesh. These images show there is still a specific expectation for Muslims, more than towards other citizens, to show their disagreement towards those who perpetrate violent or terrorist acts.

Intercultural learning principles reject any hierarchy of cultures or categorisation of people, as well as tokenistic messages, within a human rights framework. More than ever before, intercultural learning has a role to play in providing learners with critical thinking skills, with competences to enter into dialogue and debate on controversial topics, to search for factual information and deconstruct biased images provided by mainstream media or public discourse. Various capacity-building activities aim to help young people navigate around the mass of contradictory information, address challenges related to freedom and security, and engage in intercultural dialogue.

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7. In Chapter 2, we describe the complexity of culture and the fluidity of identities, as well as the link between culture and social realities, and economic and political aspects. Culture does not exist in isolation from all these other aspects and the behaviours of individuals and groups cannot be explained by culture alone.
People fleeing war and persecution

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated there to be more than 60 million displaced people in 2016 (inside and outside their home countries). Over a million people arrived in Europe by land or sea, while close to 4 000 died en route in the Mediterranean. Most European countries are directly or indirectly affected by these human movements: Turkey, Greece and Italy by direct arrivals and the creation of immense refugee camps not dissimilar to those last seen in Europe after the Second World War; Serbia and Hungary have been affected as transition countries; and Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden as final destinations. In all these situations, various challenges emerged and political reactions strongly varied. Whereas some countries reacted by closing borders and reinforcing internal security, others further developed their asylum policy.

These movements raised important social and political questions. How are European citizens prepared to welcome refugees and migrants? How are newcomers accompanied in long-term processes of inclusion? How are European institutions responding to these arrivals? What role does youth work play in welcoming and accompanying refugees and migrants? How can young refugees’ rights and access to services be secured? And what is planned beyond first emergency interventions?

These questions invite a reconsideration of aspects related to identity and culture, to borders, to values such as solidarity, security, diversity and inclusion. Unfortunately, the movements of migrants and refugees also contributed to the rise of xenophobia and discrimination, to hate speech, to fear of terrorism and, in some cases, to equating refugees with terrorists.

Intercultural learning in this context is definitely relevant. Creating spaces for dialogue, learning from each other, promoting diversity, respect and a common culture of peace, while moving away from assimilative policies, are adequate responses in this situation and can lead to long-term solutions for “living together”.

All over Europe, many motivated volunteers have shown great enthusiasm to help in welcoming and accompanying refugees. This did not always happen without various intercultural challenges related to the image of “the refugee” or “the migrant”. In public discourse, refugees are often pictured as poor, uneducated people searching for a better economic situation and thus representing a rather homogenous group. Recent arrivals proved this image to be wrong, as many refugees, for example from Syria, came from highly educated, higher socio-economic backgrounds. Here again, intercultural learning plays an important role in deconstructing images in order to construct more co-operative models of volunteering, further away from the classical charitable models and closer to ideas of participatory inclusion.

The rise of populism

In direct connection to the above-mentioned points, several European societies are faced with the reappearance of extremist political parties, with extreme far-right movements emerging and spreading across Europe. In various countries in Europe, but also in the United States, conservative and xenophobic leaders or parties are present in the political landscape. These movements not only challenge democratic values, but also offer a simplified, “black and white” view on the world, emphasising differences between people, and polarising cultures, religions and social structures by defining them as either “bad” or “good”.

For intercultural learning trainers and facilitators, it is essential not to fall into this same simplistic trap, and to keep considering the world as a complex, diverse place. More than ever, trainers and facilitators need to question how to integrate young people from such movements or with such conservative ideas into their youth work. Polarising young people by defining them as “good” or “bad” will not contribute to the development of intercultural learning values. On the contrary, it will reinforce the beliefs of those who are already convinced, and it will isolate and marginalise young people with such ideas even more. So, one important question in youth work today is: how do we work with these young people? Is youth work prepared to listen to populist opinions while safeguarding the values of human rights and intercultural learning? Although it is easier to “preach to the converted”, it is important to involve young people directly targeted by or influenced by populist movements in intercultural learning activities within a clear human rights-based framework.

The reasons behind all forms of extremism, fear and rejection need to be looked at if a spirit of peace and common development is to be safeguarded. The primary aim of the creation of “Europe” was to safeguard peace on the continent.

While the European Union celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on 25 March 2017, the legitimacy of its existence was being questioned. Following a referendum in 2016, the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union. This decision had an enormous effect on many people living in European Union...
countries, and also on political leaders. For many, “Europe” is associated with the financial crisis, the hegemony of some over others, the loss of purchasing power and the decrease of national decision-making powers. People’s lack of trust in European institutions stems from the complex bureaucracy and administrative system of these institutions. Many people fail to see the higher purpose of Europe, which goes beyond economic factors to ensure peace on the continent, the promotion of democratic values and the protection of human rights.

Intercultural learning is a way to continue connecting people to the value-based representation of Europe and to the construction of human rights-based, democratic societies. Intercultural learning needs to hear these fears and challenges through, and to integrate them into its work in order to deconstruct simplified, populist discourses.

**Globalisation**

Globalisation is considered as a way of both promoting economic growth, social progress and intercultural relations, and of enhancing economic inequalities and increasing polarisation. Economic power is unequally distributed around the globe. Young people who live in poverty, who do not have access to education and information and who are not involved in decision-making processes cannot benefit from the opportunities offered by globalisation and risk being further marginalised. At the same time, racism, discrimination and intolerance can spread more easily with the help of new technologies. These are some of the implications of globalisation that educational processes related to intercultural learning need to take into account.

On the other hand, globalisation has helped people from various parts of the world stand together for common goals. In the past decade, new forms of learning and influencing the world have emerged. Citizens’ movements such as Occupy Wall Street or the Indignados attracted thousands of people to peacefully express their disagreement with global, capitalist systems, and to start proposing alternatives. Social networks have contributed to organising such protests in a quicker and more efficient way, thus also initiating a form of citizen responsibility when reacting to accessible news.

Intercultural learning considers a permanently changing world, where cultures, intercultural and interpersonal relationships need to be continuously redefined. Intercultural learning facilitates understanding of, and encourages curiosity about, what happens at local level as well as in the rest of the world. It also motivates people to stand in solidarity with those who are treated unfairly in any part of the world and to take action for social justice.

**Human rights and democratic citizenship**

While human rights and democratic citizenship are not new realities, the links between intercultural education, human rights education and education for democratic citizenship become more relevant in present-day societies. Promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is possible only when diversity is accepted, respected and understood, when minorities and disadvantaged groups are empowered and their access to rights is not provided in a condescending way. At the same time, democratic societies can develop only when participation is possible for everyone, taking into account their cultural or socio-economic background, religion, gender, sexual orientation or ability. It is not enough to affirm that people should have equal rights or that democratic participation is open to all. Concrete measures need to be taken to facilitate their participation and access to rights, to redress historical injustices, to combat discrimination and promote diversity. This does not mean treating people the same, rather offering different treatment to ensure equal opportunities.

Intercultural learning leads to a more nuanced understanding of the importance of respecting and protecting human rights for all and of what that means in practice in a diverse society. At the same time, it uses the human rights framework as a reference point to limit cultural relativism and to identify cultural practices that can lead to human rights abuses:

Human rights education brings to intercultural learning what is only implicit in the concept: the prevalence of universal human rights over cultural specificities, the affirmation of human rights – equality in human dignity – over and in conjunction with the need to respect and value cultural difference or diversity. It is the recognition of the “human” as a universal moral and normative framework that makes intercultural learning particularly strong as a concept and which makes it so necessary (Gomes 2006: 40).

As Europe and the world move forward, young people are responding to current challenges and opportunities in ever more creative ways. Intercultural learning is one of the ways in which young people are working to develop their understanding of the world and of themselves and to engage in intercultural dialogue. And it is, we would say, one of the most important ways.

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8. Read more about this in Chapter 2, in the section “Narratives on diversity from different sources”.

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**Intercultural learning: intersections and limitations**