Chapter 3

Facilitation and design of intercultural learning processes

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING – GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Intercultural learning approaches are evolving continuously to better respond to new and complex realities. In this chapter, we will review different approaches and key aspects for facilitators to take into account when planning content and methods.

Intercultural learning as an aim

Intercultural learning as a social and political aim promotes a world view in which people are actively engaged in processes that facilitate intercultural encounters, understand the potential of diversity, interact with each other as equals, question power relations and take action for a more just society.

The value framework of intercultural learning refers to combating stereotypes and prejudices, discrimination and racism, homophobia, domination and colonial practices, social injustice and exclusion, human rights abuses and disablism. It requires long-term efforts to address basic attitudes, redress structural injustices, heal long-standing grievances, empower the socially excluded and enable democratic mechanisms (Council of Europe 2007a).

The individual cultural dimension is no longer sufficient if we want to have a real impact. In the past, the focus of intercultural learning was predominantly on individual and cultural aspects, with little regard for the social and political ones. However, practice and research have shown that such a limited approach does not produce long-term changes, that it is time to "move away from a focus on individual (identity) difference/s towards a focus on finding, through principled intercultural discourse, consensus for social action to redress injustice and inequality in the multicultural society" (Ohana and Otten 2012: 219).

Intercultural learning as an educational approach

Intercultural learning as an educational approach guides learners, through its specific principles and methodologies, to develop a set of competences to live together in diverse societies and become agents of social change.

> As a latent, guiding pedagogical approach, high-quality intercultural education invites us to develop as reflexive agents in our interaction with people of different experiences, backgrounds, beliefs, languages and values. It facilitates working and living in interaction that often takes place in differential power relations – of gender, sexuality, social status, linguistic and socio-educational capital – and aids us in capturing what has been learnt in an organised educational context for our interaction in everyday contexts, as well as subsequent activities as a multiplier and young activist (Titley 2009: 63).

Intercultural learning is transversal; it spans all types of learning and all social relations. It does not solely address specific groups in society, but instead involves everyone. Intercultural learning is also a very practical type of learning, strongly embedded in everyday realities. It implies an intentional process of reflection with the aim of stimulating action for social transformation.

Intercultural learning as a topic

Intercultural learning can also be introduced as a specific topic in a training or education programme. While this approach can be a good starting point, its effects are very limited and, if not prepared carefully, potentially negative. When intercultural learning is framed as a topic it refers mainly to culture and general (often stereotypical) specificities of cultures. It can be a good starting point to arouse interest in the topic, but intercultural learning as topic can rarely, if ever, create opportunities for authentic dialogue and multiperspectivity or critical thinking. Oversimplified theories, methods and activities run the risk of creating more stereotypes, enhancing the socio-cultural hierarchy, developing an understanding that is not embedded in social reality and losing any potential for social transformation.

For example, in an international youth meeting one may include a session dedicated to "intercultural learning", where participants are told what intercultural learning is, or what it should be, without any reference to their own contexts and concerns. One hour where participants learn about the iceberg model and draw a few conclusions about how to live together in diversity cannot lead to significant changes in the mindset of participants, or, even worse, might make them think that intercultural learning only applies to people from other countries. Often, in this case, there is a risk of oversimplifying intercultural learning. Participants tend to react by saying that they already know about it and apply it in their daily lives or do not need any additional competences. They fail to understand the importance of aspects such us: tackling one's own identity, cultural belonging and systemic co-dependence. A facilitator may "tick the box" of intercultural learning by approaching things this way, but participants may actually have little to learn about living together. A comment in the hallway about how minorities only want more rights or how weird other people are would then come as no surprise.

Addressed in a superficial way, intercultural learning might offer young people the impression that they are competent in intercultural settings. They might be very excited about "living together" among certain groups, but maintain a negative attitude towards other groups. If people remain at the surface, then they will continue to employ double standards and only interact with members of the cultures they like or value. They might be in favour of different ethnic groups, but not all; and in favour of equal opportunities and social justice, but only for the "good ones".

KEY ASPECTS FOR MEANINGFUL INTERCULTURAL LEARNING PROCESSES

In order to avoid superficial learning processes, some key aspects can support facilitators in creating meaningful intercultural learning processes that lead to social change.

Good intentions are not enough

Paul C. Gorski's article "Good intentions are not enough: a decolonizing intercultural education" (Gorski 2008) takes the view that despite unquestionably good intentions on the part of most people who call themselves intercultural educators, most intercultural education practices, instead of challenging the dominant hegemony, actually support prevailing social hierarchies, and inequitable distributions of power and privilege.

In order to develop meaningful intercultural processes, the learning processes first and foremost must not enforce stereotypes, prejudices or cultural hierarchy, and must not preserve social injustices, nor reconstruct these aspects in the training environment.

For example, it was believed for a long time that contact between people from different cultures would reduce stereotypes and prejudices. Studies[17] have shown that if certain conditions are not met, not only are attitudes towards others not improved, but there is a high risk of enforcing stereotypes and prejudices. In order to successfully challenge and break stereotypes, certain conditions must be met when people with diverse cultural backgrounds interact and all these conditions can be met in educational settings and youth work.

17. The most famous is the Contact Hypothesis, developed by Gordon W. Allport (1954) and tested by many others under different conditions.

1. Equal status within a situation – Ensuring that the distribution of power between people in a particular situation is equal and does not reflect the hierarchical distribution of power that might be present in wider society. In other words, the education or youth work setting should not be a way for the dominant group to impose on or "teach" the non-dominant group.
2. Common goals (active goal-oriented effort) – The interaction should be focused on reaching on overarching objective.
3. Intergroup co-operation – An interdependent effort without intergroup competition.
4. The presence of social norms supporting intergroup contact – Norms that are preferably defined by the group and that everyone is aware of and in agreement with.

Not being aware of the complex perspectives on intercultural contact can do more damage than good. Good intentions need to be backed up by intercultural competences and a deep understanding of intercultural learning principles.

Another example is related to "intercultural evenings", an activity commonly undertaken in international youth training events, in which participants make a brief presentation about their country and bring traditional food, drinks and music. When we present a culture in a few minutes, the potential to develop or strengthen stereotypes in the minds of the audience is very high. Participants might enjoy the food, music and dance, but this is as far as they get in the interaction. Moreover, this may even emphasise a certain hierarchy between cultures in the minds of the audience, since there is no time to give enough background for the aspects presented or to make references to the diversity within the country. This kind of interaction can be fun, but using it to achieve the objectives of intercultural learning can be problematic. This is not to say that the fun in intercultural learning must disappear, but the approaches and methods need to be carefully selected to ensure that the expected learning outcomes are not too ambitious for the proposed activities. In some cases, young participants who have never been abroad are likely to get an idea about how diverse the world is, so this could be a useful starting point. However, if an intercultural evening is to be included in a programme, careful consideration needs to be given to its limits and to developing creative ways to make it part of a longer and deeper process of reflection.

Consider the micro and macro contexts

Intercultural learning should not focus exclusively on individual aspects. The approaches should be embedded in the local and international socio-political context, taking into account the social reality and history, and the influence of the context on the way participants behave, react and interact in learning situations and real life.

Intercultural learning is not about addressing abstract topics, but working with very specific needs and contexts of participants. Sometimes training sessions create their own climate, as if they are cut off from the rest of the world. Intercultural learning is effective when it actually leaves the room, when what was learned in the safe training environment transfers to the outside world, into the social realities of the learners.

Opportunities for taking intercultural learning out of the educational setting can also be useful tools for linking intercultural learning to a given context. For example, on a training course, a visit to local communities to discover how relations between communities are organised, what works and what the challenges are can be a powerful tool for contextualising intercultural relations.

The self–others–society triangle

Intercultural learning offers opportunities to learn about people with different cultural backgrounds, while also learning about oneself, as intercultural encounters often act as a mirror. Learning about other cultures and having to describe one's culture to other people leads not only to a better understanding of different cultures (including one's own), but also to a better understanding of how culture interlinks with social, political and economic aspects and influences our behaviour. Intercultural learning activities focus on understanding one's own world view and attitudes towards diversity at the same time as understanding others' world views and attitudes. Moreover, it facilitates understanding of the intricate connections of various groups in society, of historical injustices and state policies that either perpetuate hierarchy and discrimination or favour diversity.

Intercultural learning starts from the needs of young people and is strongly linked to their everyday life environment. The focal point is the learner and learning is not defined in terms of content, but in terms of learning objectives and competences.

When the concepts and activities proposed are meaningful to the learners involved, intercultural learning offers a framework to understand the self–other–society relations and facilitates reflection on how learning can help us reframe the realities and better respond to them.

The commitment to foster social change

Intercultural learning processes go beyond the celebration of diversity through cultural and artistic events, and aim at redressing inequality and fostering social change. When learning about different cultural groups, their reality and history, one inevitably learns about discrimination towards those groups, inequality and injustice. The commitment to foster social change is one of the most powerful outcomes of intercultural learning. It implies that the learner understood the situation in its complexity, is able to empathise with people from other cultural groups, has respect for human rights and is willing to take action and to influence policies and structural changes in their own reality.

Ongoing process

Intercultural learning is never fully accomplished; it is an ongoing, lifelong process. The concept of "process" implies aspects such as: systemic, continuous change over time; equifinality (different paths to the same outcome); and multi-finality (one path to multiple outcomes) (Spitzberg and Chagnon 2009: 5).

In the process of learning, learners reshape their world view based on new knowledge, skills and attitudes they acquire. Their perception of reality changes based on new learning, but reality also changes, new variables come into play, complex situations need to be faced. Therefore, we can never say that intercultural learning is accomplished, but it is always a process, just like the construction of identity.[18]

A powerful intercultural learning experience motivates learners to find new ways to expand their learning in their own context. For example, when realising her Western-centred literary focus, one participant challenged herself to read a book from every country.[19] Other ways of continuing the learning outside the educational setting include engaging in community work, creating new projects with an intercultural focus or other types of activities, depending on the person's resources and creativity.

Heuristic process

Heuristic learning is a process that enables people to learn something for themselves, in a practical way. Intercultural learning starts from the experience of participants and uses methods that encourage learners to discover solutions by and for themselves. Facilitators do not tell participants what they should do, feel, behave, like, etc., but create opportunities for analysis and reflection, for reframing the realities and responding to them and developing tools for action.

An important shift in intercultural learning has been from using role play and artificial cultures to sharing life experience with other participants and analysing real-life case studies or policy documents. These types of activities have a bigger learning potential and can foster social change in a more powerful way than activities in which participants pretend to be members of different artificially created cultures.

Walk the talk

Trainers and facilitators of intercultural learning processes have the responsibility to behave in a way that reflects the competences they wish their participants to develop. Talking about the need for social inclusion while constantly ignoring the interventions of a person belonging to a disadvantaged group gives contradictory messages. At the same time, talking about the importance of standing up to injustices but ignoring disrespectful or stereotypical comments from participants is again an inconsistent approach. It must be clear for everybody that racism, prejudice or any kind of discrimination has no place in the room. This does not mean shutting off people who express strong prejudices, rather using the opportunity to discuss and deconstruct them, even if this takes away some time from the pre-established schedule. Being flexible and addressing the bias expressed by participants immediately or during a following activity designed specifically (or both) is a way to reach the learning objectives and take into account the current situation in the group of participants.

Challenging values, norms and assumptions, which intercultural learning often does, activates strong emotions. Participants are willing to fully engage in these processes only if there is confidence among the group

18. See more about identity construction in the section "Culture, identity and social realities" in Chapter 2.
19. See www.ted.com/talks/ann_morgan_my_year_reading_a_book_from_every_country_in_the_world, accessed 14 December 2017.

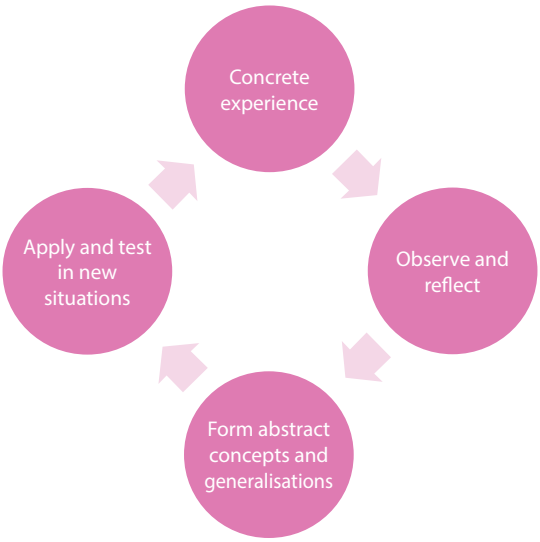
members, mutual respect and honesty. Therefore, creating an environment of confidence and respect is a prerequisite for participants to feel comfortable in sharing different viewpoints, perceptions and feelings, and to arrive at acceptance and understanding.

Experiential learning

The most common approach in non-formal education and especially in intercultural learning, human rights education, education for democratic citizenship and related fields is the experiential learning cycle developed by David A. Kolb (1984), building upon earlier work by Dewey, Levin and Piaget. This cyclical model of learning starts from the idea that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience and consists of four stages that form a sequence:

- concrete experience
- reflective observation
- abstract conceptualisation
- active experimentation

Figure 5: Stages of experiential learning



Source: Adapted by Oana Nestian Sandu[20]

Experiential learning is based on the assumption that learning needs to start from the relationship of the participant to the topic, from the concrete experience of the person. Through a process of sharing observations and reflections the participants achieve ownership of what is learned. Learning from experience is increased when people deliberately reflect on it. For this reason, the debriefing process is crucial in experiential learning. Generalisation and development of abstract concepts that can apply in real-world situations lead to the transfer of learning. When knowledge, skills and attitudes are transferred to new situations, they are reinforced and form the basis of a new learning cycle.

Experiential learning favours the implementation of the key aspects presented above, as well as the development of core competences in intercultural learning described in the next section.

COMPETENCES DEVELOPED THROUGH INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

Intercultural learning leads to the development of a set of attitudes, knowledge and skills that help young people to understand themselves and others, and to understand diversity and the socio-political context, in order to be able to act for social transformation.

A non-exhaustive list of these competences is presented below. This list is based on different models and practices in intercultural learning. The competences are presented separately for educational purposes, but in reality they are very much interlinked, which makes it crucial for intercultural learning processes to aim at developing them in a harmonious way.

20. Variations of the model are presented in *T-Kit 1 – Organisational management* (Council of Europe 2000b), *T-Kit 6 – Training essentials* (Council of Europe 2002) and *Compass – A manual on human rights education with young people* (Council of Europe 2012).

Values and attitudes

Respect for oneself and others

Respect for oneself and others is rooted in the respect for human dignity and a genuine belief in equality and freedom among human beings. It starts with trying to understand oneself and others, acknowledging that people have different identities and accepting the complex realities in which people live. It involves the capacity to understand that there is more than one possible and correct set of values, attitudes and beliefs.

Respect involves an appreciation of others and of diversity and does not necessarily imply agreement with, or adoption of, the other's world view. Moreover, it does not imply tolerating beliefs, practices or ways of life that violate human rights.

A sense of social justice and social responsibility

Social responsibility starts with the capacity to comprehend human rights as a concept of social justice and leads to the willingness to stand up when human rights are violated. This attitude is built upon the following:

- a sense of human dignity, of self-worth and of others' worth, irrespective of social, cultural, linguistic or religious differences;
- a sense of responsibility for one's own actions, a commitment to personal development and social change;
- a sense of justice, the desire to work towards the ideals of freedom, equality and respect for diversity.

Openness and curiosity towards diversity

Curiosity is what moves us towards others, while fear triggers us to run away from others. Genuine curiosity and openness mean suspending assumptions and value judgments, dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty and exploring unknown "territories" with an open mind.

Openness implies the willingness to move beyond one's comfort zone and pursue knowledge in spite of anxious feelings. It is the force that leads people to discover other beliefs and world views, while questioning their own, to develop new perceptions and to accept that the construction of something new implies the possible breakdown of the old – such as perceptions, ideas and lifestyles.

Tolerance of ambiguity

Tolerance of ambiguity refers to people's attitude towards unclear situations and incompatible perspectives. People with a high tolerance of ambiguity see value in opposing statements, without having to agree with either, and find multiple senses and potentialities in intercultural encounters. They avoid assumptions and seek to understand things rather than to make value judgments right away. They do not seek information that supports their own beliefs, but information that helps them understand others and view their perspective on the situation as being equally valid. People with a low tolerance of ambiguity have a strong need for clarity and order, they want to avoid uncertainties. They want to avoid arguing for two opposing views at the same time.

Tolerance of ambiguity implies moving beyond fixed and inflexible categories and a willingness to deal constructively with contradictions and complexity. Given the diversity of cultures and the complexity of identities, this attitude is particularly relevant in intercultural learning. Ambiguous and uncertain situations offer space for influencing and being influenced (Council of Europe 2008a), and for learning and transforming; they can energise people not only to understand others, but also to initiate processes of change within themselves. Therefore, it requires openness to alternative opinions, interpretations, norms and lifestyles.

Tolerance of ambiguity is not to be confused with cultural relativism. Having the competence to put one's own opinions, actions and behaviours into question does not imply an unlimited acceptance of all practices and views in the name of culture.

Knowledge and understanding

Knowledge of culture, politics and history

Knowledge of culture refers to the understanding of how culture shapes people's world views and behaviours, and also of the wider context in which culture operates, taking into account social and political aspects. It

implies a certain level of knowledge regarding the beliefs, values and practices specific to various cultures, as well as an understanding of the internal diversity of cultural groups.

Knowledge of politics and current affairs leads to an understanding of power structures, dominant and non-dominant groups within a country, and international relations and conflicts. It facilitates the identification of discriminatory practices and institutional barriers between and within cultural groups, which restrict and disempower certain group members. It also helps avoid the generalisation of practices: something that works or makes sense for one group or in one society is not necessarily transferable or can be imagined in another social context, because of different history, political situations or social structures.

Knowledge of history implies an understanding of both the processes through which history is recorded and the content presented. An intercultural approach to history guides people to obtain information from multiple, diverse sources and to reject nationalistic narratives. It enables people to decipher the political influence on the way they perceive culture,[21] to understand migration processes, oppression and exclusion mechanisms.

Knowledge of human rights

Human rights are the fundamental standards that allow people to live in dignity. They are universal and inalienable, which means that they apply to everyone, without exception, and they cannot be taken away. They provide a framework for people to be free and equal.

Knowledge and critical understanding of human rights principles and international legal instruments empower people to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others. Intercultural learning facilitates acknowledging that human rights apply to all human beings, regardless of cultural backgrounds and of the inequalities that still exist in practice.

Knowing about human rights ensures that intercultural learning is understood within a framework of equality, and thus protection from any form of discrimination.

Knowledge of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination

Understanding how stereotypes and prejudices are formed, how they function and how to break them[22] is a prerequisite for reaching a deeper understanding of oneself and others, and of the dynamics of intercultural relations. Relying on stereotypes distorts the perception of others and favours emotional arguments that confirm existing preconceptions. The intercultural perspective requires recognising that reality is plural, complex, dynamic and changing. One's own background and beliefs act as cultural lenses through which one can see the world. To understand the plurality of society means becoming aware of the limitations of one's own perspective, of these lenses, in interaction with others. Moreover, knowledge about the functioning of stereotypes can also help overcome the internalised stereotypes about oneself as a member of a group.

Knowledge of current and past discriminatory policies and practices, of power relations and institutional biases leads to a better understanding of the dynamics between different groups in society. Intercultural learning facilitates an understanding of how the allocation of resources and access to services can be used to disempower people and to limit their participation in society, based on cultural biases and ethnocentric views. Examples of this can be found in historical phenomena like slavery and colonialism and in the present-day limiting of rights and participation by public authorities or governments that employ policies or take decisions that: prevent the construction of a house of worship for a specific group; limit access to education or to the labour market; allocate inadequate resources to the development of neighbourhoods where migrants or minorities live; make the process of obtaining citizenship or residency permits extremely bureaucratic; or restrict or make it hard for certain groups to exercise the right to vote.

Knowledge of cultural differences in communication

Language serves as a tool for communication, but also as a "system of representation" for perception and thinking (Bennett 1998) and for social relationships. Both verbal and non-verbal language can have different meanings in different cultures. Misinterpretations or misunderstandings in communication can hinder intercultural relations and lead to intercultural conflicts. Being aware of differences in communication and interaction processes and respecting some basic rules is important to ensure successful intercultural communication (Olafsdottir 2011).

21. See more details in the section "Narratives on diversity from different sources" in Chapter 2.
22. See more details in the section "Stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination" in Chapter 2.

- Do not make automatic interpretations, assumptions and judgments.
- Think "outside of the box".
- Be prepared to explain what seems to be obvious for you.
- Listen to yourself and what you are saying.
- Listen and ask questions.
- Use your capacities to think critically.
- Question value judgments.
- Focus on solutions, not problems.

Between what I think, what I want to say, what I believe I am saying, what I say, what you want to hear, what you hear, what you believe you understand, what you want to understand and what you do understand, there are at least nine possibilities for misunderstanding.[23]

Skills

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to step outside one's own frame of reference and adopt another person's frame of reference. It implies understanding the thoughts and feelings of other people, imagining their needs and expectations and experiencing similar emotions, leading to a respectful understanding of what other people are experiencing.

Empathy does not come easy. It needs to be practised continuously in order to overcome the challenges of complex situations and it certainly requires avoiding clear-cut categories and preconceived ideas. Practising empathy starts with motivation and leads to acting in the spirit of solidarity. Empathy does not mean "knowing" what the other person thinks or feels or is. It means attempting to put oneself into someone else's shoes, without pretending to be that other person. In the early years of international youth work, one popular activity consisted of asking participants to stand in a circle, take their shoes off and jump into the neighbour's shoes, in order to feel that it is different, that you can try, but that these are still not your shoes.

Solidarity

Solidarity is described by Peter Lauritzen as "the practical, social and political side to empathy" and includes the capacity to interact and work with others, undertaking social and political action, challenging and transgressing existing power structures (Council of Europe 2008a: 270). It implies concern and care for other people's well-being, especially for disadvantaged groups. Acting in a spirit of solidarity leads to a more cohesive society, in which mutually supportive communities of free individuals pursue common goals by democratic means.

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is the capacity to formulate questions, to analyse perspectives and practices using explicit criteria. It means switching from passive listening to actively engaging with the information received. It is an ability that helps people distinguish opinions from facts and be on guard when it comes to, for example, the media and populist messages from politicians, who often take information out of context, exaggerate it or spin it in a way that suits their interests.

Critical thinking implies carefully vetting the source of information for how credible it is, what are its interests and motivation, whether it is attempting to manipulate the audience or to promote fake news. It also implies recognising our own preconceptions and being aware of how our cultural background affects our perception and understanding.

This skill has become even more essential in the last decade, with the increase in access to information from all kinds of media, and particularly from social media. How thoroughly does one check the sources before sharing articles or information received on social media? Social media has enabled people to stay informed about worldwide events, but also to spread dangerous and harmful information that can spread immediately without being checked.

Active listening

Active listening is the ability to concentrate fully not only on what is being said but also on non-verbal aspects such as body language, tone, facial expressions, etc. It involves being fully present, not interrupting, not assuming to already know what is being said, asking careful questions and identifying inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages.

23. Quote translated from French by Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja and Bernard Weber: "Entre ce que je pense, ce que je veux dire, ce que je crois dire, ce que je dis, ce que vous voulez entendre, ce que vous entendez, ce que vous croyez en comprendre, ce que vous voulez comprendre, et ce que vous comprenez, il y a au moins neuf possibilités de ne pas se comprendre.".

In an intercultural perspective, active listening is an important way of learning about various cultural beliefs and behaviours, ways of communication and subtleties of meaning.

Dealing constructively with conflicts

Dealing constructively with conflicts is the ability to map conflicts in order to identify the real needs that lie behind what is being said and to find a common solution that satisfies the needs of all parties involved. It implies the willingness to see others as equals and to find solutions that benefit everyone – to be proactive, rather than reactive.

In an intercultural perspective, this means taking a conscious step away from the "us versus them" dichotomy. It requires knowledge about cultural specificities, behaviours and communication styles and an understanding that individual citizens are not to blame for the actions of their government. But most of all it requires openness towards intercultural dialogue.

Conflicts can lead to social transformation if they are seen in a positive framework, with the potential to produce change and growth. Conflict transformation does not mean finding quick solutions, but investing the energy in relationships and social structures to generate long-term commitment to change, equality and social justice.

FACILITATORS' ROLE IN INTERCULTURAL LEARNING PROCESSES

In non-formal education, learning processes are facilitated while considering that the primary learning responsibility lies with the group of participants and that they are influenced by the learning context and physical setting. However, trainers and facilitators bring their personal qualities, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, their own interests and cultural backgrounds into the learning process. For this reason, certain aspects need to be taken into account when preparing and running intercultural learning processes.

Intercultural learning situations involve a process of understanding, of deconstructing and reconstructing our identity. For this reason, they can be emotionally challenging for both participants and facilitators. They require a high level of flexibility and an ability to deal with complex emotions, in particular group dynamics. Facilitators should be able to reflect on their own identity and engage with diversity, and take into account sensitive issues related to the social and political context of participants.

This process requires an ability to know one's own limits, deal with one's own insecurities and trust one's own abilities to challenge participants without risking their emotional safety and to offer support without risking the integrity of the educational experience. It also requires an ability to interact in an open way with opinions and viewpoints that strongly differ from the one's own, while remaining within the framework of human rights.

Therefore, the set-up of a safe learning space for intercultural learning is an important aspect in facilitating the learning process. However, this does not mean avoiding hot topics, conflicts and political aspects. A safe learning space means creating a climate where it is possible to ask for everyone's ideas, a learning environment that is inclusive and participatory, promoting relations among equals and authentic whole-person conversations, in which thoughts and feelings can be expressed without fear of being judged.

Moreover, facilitators need to be able to make a political and social analysis of society in general, in particular that specifically related to the young people with whom they work. This requires staying informed about political and social debates relevant for the young people concerned, being aware of the challenges and issues young people face and understanding their causes and effects, in order to:

- raise participants' awareness of the need to look beyond the obvious and superficial for adequate explanations of the situations they encounter;
- help participants identify what they want to change in society and why they want to change it;
- support participants in identifying the adequate approaches and methods for making the change they want to see (Ohana and Otten 2012: 234).

The competence to integrate participants' socio-political contexts into an educational programme has been described in the framework of TALE[24] as the ability to:

- understand the relevance of the socio-political context for the educational activity;
- understand the socio-political contexts of the learners;
- choose ways and methods to integrate the socio-political context into the educational programme.

24. Trainers for Active Learning in Europe (TALE): http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/tale, accessed 4 October 2017.

This further implies that the themes of intercultural learning activities should be relevant for the participants involved. Linking them to participants' life experiences, beliefs and need for social change is crucial. Facilitators need to prepare by collecting information about the background and interest of participants, giving relevant examples and making links from education activities to participants' lives.

In order to support competence development, a Competence Model for Trainers was developed as part of the European Training Strategy, targeting trainers, youth workers and youth leaders working on an international level. Intercultural competence is one of the six areas of the model. The model includes for each area criteria and indicators that define the competences in more detail, together with a glossary. More information about the intercultural competence area can be found here https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3624/ETS_ComMod_Tr_InterculturalComp.pdf

Learning content and activities need to be adapted to the specific context. Activities need to be carefully chosen to ensure they do not promote a hierarchical understanding of cultures that maintains the hegemony of certain groups. One option is to use diverse educational concepts and references, from more than one country or area. A diverse team of facilitators that comes from a variety of cultural, linguistic and social backgrounds and that has experiences that are relevant to the group of participants and to the objectives of the activity can also support the conditions for intercultural learning.

Facilitating intercultural learning processes also requires a commitment to human rights values and familiarity with the concepts and practices of human rights education. Human rights principles should be reflected not only in the activities and content discussed, but also in the attitudes and behaviours of the facilitators.

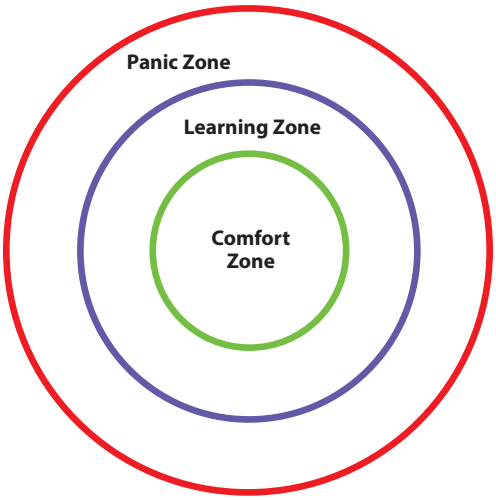
One of the core aspects of intercultural learning refers to addressing stereotypes and prejudices. In non-formal education reflection and debriefing play a very important part and can offer a space to learn about one's own prejudices and overcome them. Facilitators need to find the balance between giving participants the opportunity to express their opinions and challenging their stereotypes and prejudices in a safe environment. This implies awareness of one's own biases and a willingness to discuss them in the team during the preparation phase.

Moreover, facilitating intercultural learning processes requires awareness of the existence and functioning of discrimination and its possible expression among the group of participants. Facilitators must be ready to deal with possible expressions of discrimination among the group of participants in a constructive way. In the choice of methods and content, it is important to take into account the fact that some participants might have experienced discrimination in real life and some activities might activate painful memories and unexpected reactions. Deciding how to handle situations like this before they arise can be very useful – whether facilitators decide to have one team member take care of individual participants needing extra support or by asking participants to take care of themselves throughout the process and only do what they feel appropriate to do.

All human interactions carry a potential for conflict. This potential is even higher in situations that challenge values or are emotionally demanding, such as intercultural encounters. Facilitators should be prepared to address conflicts that may arise among participants, especially if participants come from conflict or post-conflict areas or from areas with specific social and cultural tensions and unrest. A pre-mapping of potential sources of conflict and an agreed strategy for action in the educational team can help facilitators be more prepared. Identifying potential sources of conflict among participants should not lead to an avoidance of discussions related to challenges, power relations or conflicts that exist in society, but to a way of using them skilfully for their transformative power.

Intercultural learning generates profound changes of attitudes and behaviours. Participants experience new emotions, their values are brought into question and they adopt new strategies of learning about themselves and others. Facilitators best accompany participants in these changes when they find the right balance between challenge and support. On the one hand, participants should be encouraged to seek these changes, to challenge themselves and others. On the other hand, their needs and the limits must be respected in these processes. Too much support or too little challenge make changes difficult. At the same time, a big challenge with little support (getting people too much outside of their comfort zone) might generate panic and a refusal to take part in the process. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that some participants have more experience or are better prepared for being challenged, while others need more time. The importance of balance between challenge and support is shown in the figure below.

Figure 6: Adapted from Karl Rohnke's comfort, stretching, panic zone model by Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja



We all have something we call our "comfort zone". This is our home, the language we speak, our habits, our friends and our value system, the things we do without much effort. In the comfort zone, we learn less, we can simply "be" more. When we leave the comfort zone, we enter something called a "stretching" or "learning" zone. Here, we need to make particular efforts in order to adapt to the environment. For example, when we change jobs or run or take a training course in another language, we get out of our habits. If we go too far into the stretching zone, we take the risk of landing in the "panic" zone. Here, learning becomes difficult again. We cannot act or control anymore, and the only thing we wish to do is to go back to the comfort zone. Being in a panic zone for a short while happens to everyone in new, unexpected or dangerous situations. However, remaining in the panic zone for too long puts people in danger and inhibits learning opportunities.

In intercultural learning contexts, this model helps us understand that participants have different learning rhythms and different learning zones. While it is important to get participants out of the comfort zone and into the learning zone, it is equally important to identify when someone may be in a panic zone and to offer support, by allowing them to get back into good learning conditions, thus recognising the diversity of needs and possibilities within a group. What is learning or comfort for one person can be a panic zone for someone else, and vice versa.

Moreover, the role of the facilitator is also to enable interaction and peer-to-peer learning. It does not all have to come from the facilitator, as participants can be very supportive both in challenging and transforming.

Another important role in intercultural learning is played by the evaluation process. Evaluation is not understood as external control done at the end of an activity, but as a part of the continuous learning process in which "both educators and learners become able to co-operate for [themselves] and group improvement through a critical, multi-perspective approach to their work" (North-South Centre of the Council of Europe 2008: 53). Evaluation offers the space to reflect on the complexity of the educational process and the relationship between different elements. The purpose of evaluation is to check how far the objectives set before the activity are met at different stages of the activity, and how these objectives respond to the needs of the participants. At the same time, evaluation can offer a sense of the personal development participants go through and how they feel in relation to the activities and outcomes reached. There are some specific intercultural aspects to be evaluated in relation to the learning process and content (adapted from the "Guidelines for intercultural dialogue in non-formal learning/education activities"; Council of Europe/European Union 2014):

- the degree to which the environment and methods stimulated participation, critical thinking and multiperspectivity;
- the degree to which objectives related to intercultural learning have been met;
- the degree to which participants feel able and motivated to continue development, act as multipliers, create partnerships and common activities;
- the link between intercultural learning and other topics in the programme;
- the link between the intercultural contents in the programme and the daily life contexts of participants;
- the activities tackling stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination and global interconnectedness;
- the activities related to identity and power relations;
- the way of dealing with conflict;
- the interaction with the local environment, when relevant.

DESIGNING AND RUNNING RELEVANT SESSIONS FOR DIFFERENT TARGET GROUPS

The main role of a facilitator is to accompany young people in their intercultural learning processes. This endeavour implies starting from participants' needs and specific contexts in which they live and assisting them in defining their place in a changing world and contributing to the development of intercultural societies.

A. Context

Intercultural learning and intercultural theory are very practical. Discussing realities that are too far away or that are hard to imagine or understand will not contribute to the development of participants' intercultural competence. On the contrary, it might promote stereotypes and give the impression that certain cultures are "exotic" or that certain realities are impossible to understand. Understanding the context participants live in, their background and their learning needs helps facilitators prepare adequate content and use methods to which the participants will respond.

An analysis of participants' context can be made by reflecting on the following aspects.

- What is the target group? Who are the participants?
- What is their background (cultural, socio-economic, gender, etc.)?
- How is their identity perceived in the society they live in?
- What are the main issues that emerge in their context? Who are the disadvantaged groups? What are the power relations in society between the different groups to which participants belong?
- How are these issues reflected in the wider context (institutional, legislative, power relations in society, access to equal treatment)?
- What are the competences that young people need to develop in order to be able to address the issues from an intercultural perspective and act for the respect of human rights for all?
- To what extent will learners be confronted with issues of inequality and injustice that do not concern them directly?

The answers to these questions can serve as the main reference points for formulating the objectives of the intercultural learning processes.

Ideally, an intercultural learning process brings together people from diverse backgrounds, people who can offer different perspectives, while the facilitators mainly support participants to allow them to learn from each other. However, this scenario is not always possible and having little diversity in the group does not mean that intercultural learning is not possible. Carefully selecting the content and methods that are relevant for participants leads to successful intercultural learning processes in any context.

B. Content

The choice of content and methods should respond to the specific contexts and adaptations should be made as much as possible. There is specific learning content to be addressed in intercultural learning processes. Depending on the duration of the process and the learning objectives, a different focus can be given to each topic. Of course, the topics are not isolated, they are interlinked and several aspects can be tackled in one activity. The main topics addressed in intercultural learning are:

- identity;
- culture;
- social and political context;
- differences in perspectives;
- stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination;
- intercultural communication and dialogue.

However, learning content should never be taken for granted. Analysing it in the light of the social context of participants is important not only to ensure that it is relevant for young people, but also that it does not strengthen stereotypes and prejudices nor promote one-sided perspectives. Activities need to be prepared by taking into account the diversity of learners and using locally available examples. Here are some suggestions for aspects to take into account in various situations.

- There is little diversity within the group
  - Make sure the group is exposed to various cultural and socio-political contexts in experiential activities.
  - Invite speakers and trainers with various cultural backgrounds.
  - Use video material and images that have the potential to challenge stereotypes.
  - Explore differences within their cultural group. Discuss how these differences shape participants' identity.
  - Challenge participants' perspectives and opinions on current dilemmas and issues on which they might have different perspectives.
- Participants belong to different groups between which there is tension or conflict
  - Create opportunities for participants to learn about and from each other and to develop their empathy.
  - Use activities that show participants how differences in perception can affect their world view.
  - Address aspects such as ethnocentrism and challenge participants' stereotypes and prejudices about each other's group.
  - Allow participants to discover similarities among themselves.
  - Provide opportunities for participants to reach common goals and detach themselves from the "us and them" perspective.
  - Create spaces and allow sufficient time for intercultural dialogue.
- Participants experienced discrimination on a regular basis
  - Discussing real cases of discrimination that participants have experienced is a powerful way to learn, empathise and find solutions together. However, not all participants are ready to share this type of detail from their life. Make it clear that participants are free to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable with.
  - When presenting a theoretical framework to interpret reality and discrimination mechanisms, start from their own examples.
  - Focus on activities that empower participants to stand up for themselves and for others.
- Participants never/rarely experienced discrimination
  - It is important when discussing about discrimination to start from concrete examples, but some people have never experienced discrimination. That is why it is important to prepare some examples which are meaningful to the target group.
  - Experiential methods and use of video material have a more powerful effect, but a tactful debriefing is important to make sure participants are able to extrapolate and transfer their learning to real-life situations.
  - Balance the activities that focus on developing empathy with activities that focus on knowledge about causes and effects of structural discrimination. While the emotional component is important in order to be able to empathise with victims of social injustices, it is not enough. It is equally important to have knowledge about the mechanisms of discrimination and about how to combat it.

C. Methods

The methods that are best suited to reaching the goals of intercultural learning involve an experiential learning approach. When selecting methods, facilitators need to take into account participants' needs and the learning objectives, as well as their personal preferences and skills as facilitators. Using a method that the facilitator is not comfortable with or does not fully understand can lead to poor facilitation, which in turn leaves participants wondering how or why they have to do the activity.

Moreover, the methods should facilitate interaction and authentic dialogue and in no way replicate inequitable dynamics in the activity. This means ensuring that people do not feel excluded and that participants do not act on their stereotypes, or at least not without the facilitator being aware of these manifestations and addressing them in a constructive way.

Method selection[25]

The following questions – considered with care – may help facilitate your work in putting together a particular programme element. The list of questions is not closed – you may well find others more important.

25. Adapted from the previous edition of the *T-Kit on intercultural learning.*

a. Aims and objectives

- What actually do we want to achieve with this particular method, in this particular part of the programme?
- Did we define our objectives clearly and is this method suitable?
- Is this method in line with reaching the overall aims of our activity?
- Will this method be effective in helping us to advance?
- Does this method fit with the principles of our defined methodology?
- Is this method appropriate in the present dynamic of this particular intercultural learning situation?
- Are all requirements for using this method (the group or learning atmosphere, relations, knowledge, information or experiences, for example) provided by previous processes?
- What is the topic we are talking about?
- Which different aspects (and conflicts) can arise using this method, and how far can we pre-empt (deal with) them?
- Is the method able to meet the complexity and linkages of different aspects? How can the method contribute to open new perspectives and perceptions?

b. Target group

- For and with whom do we develop and use this method?
- What is the precondition of the group and the individuals in the group?
- What consequences could the method have for their interactions, mutual perceptions and relations? Does the method meet the expectations of the group (individuals)?
- How can we arouse their interest?
- What will they need (individually and as group) and contribute to this particular part of the learning process? Does the method give sufficient space for it?
- Is the method contributing to releasing their potential?
- Does the method allow enough individual expression?
- How can the method cater for the similarities and diversities of the group?
- Does the group have any particular characteristics that need our attention (age, gender, language skills, (dis)abilities, etc.) and how can the method cater for them in a positive way?
- Has the group or some individuals within it shown specific resistance or sensitivities towards the subject (minorities, gender, religion, for example) or have extreme differences (in experience or age, for example) that could impact on the dynamic?
- Where is the group at in terms of the intercultural learning process?
- Is the method suitable for the group size?

c. Environment, space and time

- What is the (cultural, social, political, personal) environment in which we use this method?
- What impact does the method have on this environment, and the environment on the method?
- Is the space "safe" for all participants to fully take part in the activity and trust the facilitators?
- Which environment (elements, patterns) is dominant in the group and why?
- Is the group atmosphere and level of communication suitable for the method?
- Does the context of this particular intercultural learning experience especially promote or hinder certain elements?
- What is the common (and individual) perception of space? Is the "common territory" of the group large enough for using the method?
- Does the method contribute to a positive environment (in which to stretch everybody's comfort zones)?
- Did we allocate enough time to the method and its proper evaluation?
- Is the debriefing process adequate and meaningful?
- Does it fit within the timing of our programme?
- How does the method deal with the (different) time perception of participants?

d. Resources/framework

- How does the method match with the resources we have at our disposal (time, room, people, materials, media, etc.)?
- Is the method using them efficiently?
- What organisational aspects do we need to take into account?
- Do we need to simplify? How can we share the responsibilities of running the method?
- To what extent do we have the relevant skills to facilitate the interactions among participants?
- In which (institutional, organisational) framework will the method be used?
- What impacts do we have to consider or foresee (on the organisational culture or preferences or on institutional aims, for example)?
- What outside actors (institutional partners or other people in the building, for instance) might interfere with what interests?

e. Previous evaluation

- Did we use this (or a similar) method before?
- What did we notice or learn from the experience?
- Are there any other experiences where we learned about the use of methods? What can they tell us now?
- Is the method and its impact to be evaluated, and how can the achievement of our objectives be measured?
- How can we secure its results for what comes next?
- What elements should we integrate into our method as part of the evaluation of our activity so far?

f. Transfer

- To what extent is our method based on (or related to) the experience of every participant and on the learning experiences encountered so far? Is the method useful for the reality of the participants or in what regard might it need to be adapted? Is the method oriented towards transfer/integration into the daily life of the participants?
- How will we provide a space for participants to integrate what they have learned into their own realities? Can a discussion or dynamic after the method help the transfer?
- What elements might facilitate a good follow-up by the participants?
- How can we use what participants learned for the next activities?

g. The role of the facilitators or trainers

- What do we think our role should be with this group, for this method?
- Have we tried to "play a film in our heads" about how everything should work?
- Did we consider our personal disposition and how it could impact on the running of the method? How are we prepared to react to outcomes that are not what we expected?
- Are we prepared for more intensive debriefing (also individually) if needed?