

Chapter 5

Intercultural learning in action

Intercultural learning processes are designed to equip young people with the competences to act for social transformation, to transfer the learning into their “real-life” contexts. The previous chapters focused on how intercultural learning processes can be conducted in non-formal education settings. This chapter looks into the contribution that intercultural learning can make to contexts outside non-formal education, not only in terms of personal development and learning outcomes but also in terms of action that can be implemented in daily practice.

The examples given are not exhaustive. They show different areas, besides non-formal education, where intercultural learning approaches link to action and initiatives. The examples have been chosen bearing in mind that they should:

- ▶ be relevant for young people, either including them as the main participants or as beneficiaries;
- ▶ be embedded in reality;
- ▶ have an educational aspect;
- ▶ have an explicit link to intercultural learning.

This chapter also aims to encourage young people interested in intercultural learning to engage in initiatives at local or international level to further develop their intercultural competence and to apply their learning in various sectors, in order to promote diversity and contribute to social transformation.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Intercultural learning is an approach that fosters the development of the competences linked to being an active citizen. For being an active citizen today, having the competences to tackle complex intercultural relations can be an important asset, to make sure that activism takes into account different perspectives on a given situation, a concern for human rights and also empathy and solidarity.

Intercultural learning in action can to be found in activism involving many cultural groups besides one’s own, as in the following examples.

- ▶ Multicultural neighbourhood committees and citizens’ groups acting for a group in the neighbourhood that is being discriminated against.
- ▶ Common celebrations among different groups and opportunities for communities to meet and address together issues that concern all of them as citizens.
- ▶ Online activism for groups whose human rights are at risk.
- ▶ Global campaigns such as “refugees welcome” that support certain groups and include them in society.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM

Intercultural learning helps us understand and value diversity. Human rights education is also about learning that we are all equal in terms of dignity and rights. Both approaches encourage an attitude of respect towards people and a call for equal opportunities.

Human rights activism for people with a different cultural background requires both an understanding of their cultural specificities and of the structural discrimination they are facing, as well as the historical injustices that contributed to the current situation. Otherwise it runs the risk of enforcing stereotypes, projecting the image that certain groups are helpless and maintaining an unbalanced power relationship. Intercultural learning prepares young people to acknowledge and address their own stereotypes and to understand the causes and consequences of discrimination on a cultural basis.

Some examples of the links between intercultural learning and human rights can be found in activities such as:

- ▶ intercultural education programmes meant to ensure that refugees or disadvantaged groups have access to education;
- ▶ socio-cultural orientation programmes for migrants to increase their participation;
- ▶ the training of civil servants to become more culturally aware and interculturally sensitive to the various backgrounds of the people they serve;
- ▶ human rights campaigns or global movements for/against political decisions in a particular country and for the realisation of human rights for all groups.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND YOUTH WORK

Youth work is commonly understood as a tool for personal development, social integration and the active citizenship of young people.²⁹ The potential of youth work is enhanced when intercultural learning is used as a transversal approach that can guide all the projects developed and action taken. Developing services that take into account diversity, including disadvantaged groups, and facilitating meaningful participation of different cultural groups, especially those that are commonly excluded or discriminated against, ensures that all voices are heard and no one is left behind.

Here are some examples of what can be done by youth work to promote intercultural learning and dialogue.

- ▶ Youth workers can map their community to identify the different profiles of young people and check whether the activities offered are accessible for them.
- ▶ Youth workers can support young people from different cultural backgrounds to engage in youth work activities and also to act as peer educators.
- ▶ Youth workers could include in their activities programmes that are specifically focused on challenging stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination or fighting hate speech.
- ▶ Cultural events featuring diverse performers or creating personal development programmes to increase the self-esteem of young people from a marginalised group.
- ▶ Youth work providers could have an explicit policy to make youth centres inclusive.
- ▶ Forming partnerships with organisations that focus on intercultural matters or represent specific groups of people that young people can learn from.
- ▶ Taking young people on discovery journeys to learn about the diversity that is present in their region.
- ▶ Organising youth exchanges abroad.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND VOLUNTARY WORK

The international voluntary service in general is an excellent context for participants to develop their intercultural competences. Being immersed in a different country and experiencing different cultural beliefs and practices, ideally supported by professionals trained themselves in intercultural learning, is a powerful way to bring intercultural learning to the day-to-day life of participants.

One example is the European Voluntary Service, a programme that develops solidarity, mutual understanding and tolerance among young people, thus contributing to reinforcing social cohesion in the European Union and to promoting young people's active citizenship. The European Voluntary Service (EVS) is based on the assumption that young people living and working abroad for a period of two to 12 months will develop their intercultural competence. Because of the length of the programmes and the expertise of both the sending and receiving organisations, EVS can ensure a strong impact on the individual and at community level. EVS involves professionally trained staff and trainers supporting the volunteers; if these elements were to be

29. See www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-essentials, accessed 14 December 2017.

missing from the EVS programme, they would run the risk of reinforcing the stereotypes, prejudices and the pigeonholing it tries to counteract.

However, voluntary work does not have to be international to contribute to the development of intercultural competences. Young people can engage in intercultural learning processes in their home country. They can volunteer with local organisations that promote diversity, organisations that work for the integration of migrants and minorities, and organisations that promote a culture of peace and intercultural dialogue.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND ORGANISING EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Any educational activity has the potential to promote intercultural learning whatever its topic, be it the environment, learning internet literacy or gaining participation skills.

For example, the “Guidelines for intercultural dialogue in non-formal learning/education activities” (Council of Europe/European Union 2014) is a practical tool for supporting organisers, trainers and facilitators of youth activities to consciously address intercultural dialogue in their projects, either as the main topic or as a transversal approach for any other topic they focus on. The tool comprises a set of indicators that are grouped under 15 criteria distributed among the three phases of an activity.

Ensuring an intercultural transversal approach to project management is one key action that young people can take to bring intercultural learning into their everyday realities, regardless of whether their projects focus on the arts, environment, education, participation, human rights, sport, etc. For example, a photographic project can ensure an intercultural approach by focusing on photographing aspects that are culturally diverse, while also inviting people with different cultural backgrounds to be photographers in the project.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND RAISING AWARENESS

Awareness-raising activities can be a useful tool for supporting people to develop intercultural competences. Some examples include:

- ▶ graffiti removal, when the graffiti bears xenophobic or racist messages;
- ▶ football tournaments designed to demonstrate opposition to the segregation of communities;
- ▶ posters and banners that challenge stereotypes or bring to light situations of discrimination;
- ▶ concerts and festivals that promote an anti-racism message.

THE LIVING LIBRARY

The Living Library was developed by the Danish youth NGO Stop the Violence (Foreningen Stop Volden). It has now been part of the youth programme of the Council of Europe since 2003 and has proven its effectiveness in contributing to intercultural learning. An organiser’s guide published in 2005 and a training course for organisers complement the process.

The Living Library functions in exactly the same way as a traditional library. That is, the “readers” may borrow a “book” for a limited duration of time. The only difference is that the “books” are human beings who are often subject to prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination or social exclusion and reading consists of a conversation. Facing one’s stereotypes and prejudices by meeting someone and hearing their story is the conceptual basis of the Living Library. For more details, check “Don’t judge a book by its cover”, the organiser’s guide, and the Living Library website.³⁰

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND CAMPAIGNING

Campaigning is a way of raising young people’s interest in intercultural learning. For example, this was the case with the two Council of Europe All Different – All Equal campaigns, which had a European scope, aimed to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia (1995), and promoted democracy, participation and human rights (2006-2007). Hundreds of activities were carried out all over Europe, educational materials were produced and different types of activities were organised under the same banner and identity, which brought much attention to these topics and put intercultural learning on the agenda of youth organisations.

30. See www.coe.int/en/web/youth/living-library, accessed 11 October 2017.

Campaigns do not need to be specifically focused on diversity or anti-discrimination to promote intercultural learning. A campaign on any subject can contribute to intercultural learning by:

- ▶ involving people with diverse backgrounds in the development of the campaign or in the images of the campaign;
- ▶ avoiding stereotypes and encouraging cultural affirmation;
- ▶ ensuring that the message of the campaign reaches diverse audiences – by using more than one language and various means of spreading the information that are accessible to disadvantaged groups.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND THE POWER OF IMAGES

Images and videos are powerful tools for promoting diversity and raising awareness about prejudices and discrimination. For example, PLURAL+ – the Youth Video Festival on Migration, Diversity and Social Inclusion³¹ – organised as a partnership between the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the International Organization for Migration, provides young people with an effective platform to explore migration, diversity and social inclusion, and to share their creative vision with the world. This approach facilitates intercultural learning both for those who are producing the video materials as well as for those who watch them. Moreover, the videos can be used as powerful materials in learning processes.

Other examples of ways in which young people can use the power of images for intercultural learning include:

- ▶ creating exhibitions to reflect the diversity of cultures that contributed to the development of the city they live in;
- ▶ documenting the neighbourhoods where migrants live or having migrants document their reality themselves, so they speak for themselves and transmit a different self-image;
- ▶ organising photography competitions that best reflect diversity, intercultural dialogue or situations of discrimination;
- ▶ creating videos on any topic of interest by interviewing people from diverse backgrounds who are knowledgeable on that particular topic.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND THE MEDIA

The media plays an important role in shaping public perception and consequently in promoting stereotypes. Intercultural learning programmes for media professionals contribute to a better (re)presentation of diversity and to diminishing the stereotypes. The Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (97) 21 on the media and the promotion of a culture of tolerance (Council of Europe 1997) outlines examples of “professional practices conducive to the promotion of a culture of tolerance”.

Young people can further the promotion of intercultural learning by engaging in collaboration with media organisations at the local level to support journalists in:

- ▶ reporting accurately on racism and intolerance and on issues involving people of different backgrounds;
- ▶ presenting positive stories related to people from disadvantaged groups or groups facing discrimination;
- ▶ alerting the public to the negative social consequences of intolerance and educating people to be open and appreciate difference as a source of enrichment;
- ▶ recruiting journalists from diverse groups.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be a great tool for bringing people together, for organising campaigns or fighting for common causes. But it can also be a tool for spreading hate, stereotypes and exclusion. Intercultural learning equips young people with the competences to combat stereotypes and hate speech, to engage in intercultural dialogue and to promote a positive approach to diversity.

The No Hate Speech Movement³² is a youth campaign of the Council of Europe promoting human rights online, with the aim of reducing the levels of acceptance of hate speech, racism and discrimination in online expression and developing online youth participation and citizenship, including in internet governance

31. See <https://pluralplus.unaoc.org>, accessed 9 October 2017.

32. See <http://nohatespeechmovement.org>, accessed 9 October 2017.

processes. The campaign is initiated and run by the Council of Europe and it includes national campaigns in 45 countries. Young people can join the movement by contacting the individual national campaigns, working with European partners or becoming online activists.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND FORMAL EDUCATION

Formal education plays a key role in instilling positive attitudes and developing intercultural competence in children and young people.

Among the many different subjects, history teaching in particular deals with “the image of the other”. The way in which various groups are presented in history lessons (with an ethnocentric approach, with an intercultural approach or by being completely ignored) creates long-lasting beliefs in students. Working on the school curricula in order to make sure that different cultures, lifestyles and individuals are represented in school-books in ways that avoid bias, stereotyping or labelling is crucial. The Council of Europe’s programmes on history and history teaching are developed in this sense. Through these programmes,³³ history teachers can complement the nationally defined materials and have access to practical tools with which to teach history from an intercultural perspective.

The appearance of the school also plays an important part in promoting diversity and ensuring representation of different groups. A very simple example is that of schools that give exposure to objects and decorative elements, texts or portraits of famous people with diverse cultural backgrounds as a sign of recognition of the cultures of all children. The Gamlebyen Skole in Oslo is a classic inner-city primary school with a wide range of languages and a combination of complex social and cultural issues. The school’s physical environment is shaped to include references to migrant children’s cultures of origin, such as the climbing wall made up of letters of the world’s alphabets, the original carved wood pillar of a destroyed mosque in Pakistan and kilims and other objects which create a warm, homely atmosphere. The school curriculum involves cultural and intercultural learning and engaging parents from different origins in school activities is a common practice.

Youth organisations can partner with schools to support their efforts to adopt an intercultural learning approach, to develop creative projects together and to work with students in extracurricular activities that:

- ▶ help them develop a feeling of belonging to the society they live in;
- ▶ support them in learning about diversity in and out of school;
- ▶ engage them in anti-discrimination initiatives.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND CULTURAL MEDIATION

Mediation as a practice was developed initially with regard to linguistic aspects and translation, in order to facilitate communication and understanding between people speaking different languages. However, the term “mediation” has evolved to refer to a third-party intervention to improve the comprehensive relationship between groups with different backgrounds, having thus widened its scope.

One example is the ROMED project of the Council of Europe,³⁴ in which mediators were trained to mediate between the Roma communities and the local authorities in the field of education, health and employment. The ROMED project and its follow-up work promotes the idea that the intervention of a mediator is necessary to build trust between Roma and public institutions, not as an act of charity, but as a responsibility for ensuring effective access to the fundamental rights of citizens.

Another example comes from the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, a Romanian NGO that developed a network of intercultural mediators³⁵ trained to facilitate the relationship between migrants and public institutions. On the one hand, they support institutions to become aware of the presence of migrants and to adapt the services to respond to their needs. On the other hand, they help migrants navigate through the bureaucracy and take action if their rights are not respected.

33. See www.coe.int/en/web/history-teaching/, accessed 9 October 2017.

34. See <http://coe-romed.org>, accessed 9 October 2017.

35. See www.migrant.ro/en, accessed 9 October 2017.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Intercultural learning is used in conflict transformation processes, particularly when the conflict includes a cultural or religious dimension. Conflict transformation through intercultural learning is a way to (re)discover “the other” in reality, beyond stereotypes. One example in this sense would be the youth peace camps, which bring together young people from conflict-affected areas and from the different sides of the conflict. Several peace-building organisations run this kind of camp. The Youth Department of the Council of Europe, for example, organises one every year.³⁶

36. See www.coe.int/en/web/youth-peace-dialogue/youth-peace-camp, accessed 11 October 2017.