

# Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work: Which Ways Forward?



## Seminar report by Ingrid Ramberg

The Role of Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work.  
Ten theses - Yesterday and Today  
by *Hendrik Otten*

'Plastic, Political and Contingent':  
Culture and Intercultural Learning  
in Directorate of Youth and Sport Activities  
by *Gavan Tittle*

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European Youth Centre Budapest,  
28-29 November 2007

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Including

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*Ten theses – Yesterday and Today*

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*'Plastic, Political and Contingent':*

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*in Directorate of Youth and Sport Activities*

by GAVAN TITLEY

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# Preface

## Creative Confusion?...

*Rui Gomes*

The aim of the youth policy of the Council of Europe, as re-affirmed by the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (Kyiv, 2008), is to provide young people, i.e. girls and boys, young women and young men with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop the knowledge, skills and competences to play a full part in all aspects of society.

Youth policy, in the way it has been developed in the Council of Europe's youth sector has an intrinsic intercultural dimension. This results to a great extent from being a policy developed together with governmental and non-governmental partners from a variety of countries (and supposedly cultures), but also because it is meant to take into account realities of young people that are very diverse across Europe and within any given society.

It is the ways in which this diversity is taken into account and given a space for participating and truly shaping youth policy that truly defines its degree of "interculturality" and, to a large extent, its relevance and its success.

The so-called policy gap – the difference between stated public policies and the way they are (not) applied or perceived on the ground – applies also, *hélas!*, to its intercultural dimension. The Council of Europe's values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law provide a strong ethical framework for a youth policy that takes into account diversity in all its forms; the way this is made visible and accessible to young people is often full of contrasts.

These contrasts are not only about the disparities in equality of opportunities among young people, or about the persisting levels of discrimination or marginalisation that some young people are likely to face and experience. It is also about the degree of seriousness of commitments to international human rights standards (and their violations),

and it is also about the ability of political and social actors to address, through social, educational and youth policies, realities that challenge perceived social consensus. The attempts to address some of these situation through the 'All Different – All Equal' European youth campaigns provided interesting examples, but also revealed the limits of actions based mostly on awareness-raising.

Intercultural learning, in this respect, has been recognised by the same 8<sup>th</sup> ministerial conference as being “particularly relevant for promoting intercultural dialogue and combating racism and intolerance”. This recognition of intercultural places a burden on youth work and youth policy practitioners, that is to live up to the expectations of policy-makers and to the requirements of education specialists, including, quite obviously, youth workers and all those who try to make sense of it in social realities that are complex in nature and whose responses cannot always be framed within pre-established conceptual models.

Youth work, and in particular European youth work in the modalities that it has been developed and shaped through the work of the European youth centres, has therefore a responsibility to review and put into question the assumed practices and heralded standards, notably in view of their validity, their application and their development. This is even more so, as Hendrik Otten reminds us, at a time when expectation on youth work are higher than ever, especially in relation to the recognition of non-formal learning and its contribution to the autonomy and social integration of young people.

What may be seen as strange with the seminar *Intercultural learning: Which ways forward?*, which this report documents, is that it did not take place earlier. It is not just that we have been “comfortably confused” in our questions and doubts, nor just “comfortably numbed” by the formidable undermining of the values and purpose of intercultural dialogue imposed upon many of us for most of this decade. It was also because there was a need to see in which way the practices and discourse would evolve, notably in view of the work done around the White Paper on intercultural dialogue and the necessary articulation with human rights and human rights education.

Strangely enough, the European youth campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation 'All Different – All Equal' did not contribute to resolve some the questions. Rather the opposite: the synthesis between the three driving themes was hardly done and, especially, the variety of actions and activities added to the sense of confusion. Creative confusion, we would like to add.

As Ingrid Ramberg rightly points out, the seminar did not always produce answers about the ways in which we should move forward with intercultural learning in youth work. But it is clear that it has constituted an important starting point, which now requires additional attention so that its results can be used as building blocks for further reflection and action. What are these building blocks? In our opinion they include:

- ◆ The need for research and youth work to communicate better and more often. While this is often put forward as almost a dogma in European youth policy (but less often put to practice), the attention placed on multicultural urban environments where young people play a central role, provides unique opportunities for collaboration with other disciplines and social sectors. The proposal to develop further European research into the ways intercultural learning is practiced and experienced could make full sense in this respect.
- ◆ The confirmation of the role of intercultural learning as central to strategies and programmes for youth work in Europe, whether it concerns approaches, methods or competences.
- ◆ The emphasis on quality youth work – including the questions of qualified youth workers – which, as an instrument of youth policy, effectively integrates the need for responses to concrete problems of concrete young people today with the necessary dialogue with a political and ethical framework that includes human rights, citizenship and a sense of common European destiny.
- ◆ The shift from methods to purpose, which can not be limited to statements of intention and higher political aims, but needs to find translation in the way youth work is practiced, youth workers are trained and the way in which youth policies are (or not) defined, implemented and monitored. In this respect, the inclusion in the debate of perspectives from the various geographical and human corners of Europe is, to us, essential.
- ◆ The importance, therefore, of bridging better youth work practice and youth policy development. Here, too, the policy gap is often wider than it should be. In intercultural learning terms, there remains a challenge to adopt and adapt a speech that can allow mutual understanding and respect for each sector's roles, experience and expertise.



Confusion, in the sense of lack of clarity and a multiplicity of directions to follow, is to a large extent inherent to intercultural learning as well. Tolerance of ambiguity is required also because not everything can be clarified in ways that make sense too all concerned at the same time.

But confusion, in relation to conceptual and practical matters related to intercultural learning is not always positive and is potentially damaging. We need to deepen and innovate the frameworks in which we think and act through youth work on issues of diversity and pluralism. How to do it, is the next challenge and step to be taken.

All good wills are welcome to participate!

Thanks are deservedly due to the participants of the seminar and the two main speakers, Hendrik Otten and Gavan Titley, for bringing forward this debate. Very special thanks also to Ingrid Ramberg for helping us make sense of it all, including meanings that we had not considered. That, too, as an important intercultural competence!

# Foreword

*by the General Rapporteur*

The aim of this report is to mirror the input to and outcome of the seminar *Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work: which ways forward?*, held at European Youth Centre Budapest, 28–29 November 2007. As always, when trying to convert into written form the polyphonic interaction within a group of people congregated to discuss something they are all deeply engaged in, a report can capture only fractions of the reflections and ideas shared.

The seminar was well organised and its outcome, with regard to the time available, quite successful. Well-chosen, comprehensive and yet short introductory lectures were followed by long exchanges of reflections, questions and answers. When talking about a practice carried out in so many hands, and in so many ways, it is vital that it is reflected through many voices. The overall level of active participation was impressively high. Participants engaged in sharing their thoughts and concerns, and many helped in adding to the general picture.

My thanks are due to all contributors, and in particular to Rui Gomes, who manages to be at one and the same time the assigner of the rapporteur's task and a support during the writing process.

Stockholm, winter 2008

*Ingrid Ramberg*



# Conclusions

*by the General Rapporteur*

The year 2007 was a year of preparation and contribution on many hands throughout Europe to what was to become the Council of Europe ‘White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. *Living Together As Equals*’. During the processing of the document mainstreaming intercultural dialogue was described as a flagship commitment. In the final document it is stated that “the intercultural approach offers a forward-looking model for managing cultural diversity” (p 2). A similar ambition as that of the Council of Europe also informs the undertakings of the European Union, where the year 2008 was declared The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

‘White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. *Living Together As Equals in Dignity*’ CM (2008) 30 final 2 May 2008.

On the threshold of this new year the European Youth Centre Budapest organised a seminar *Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work: Which Ways Forward?*, held at the European Youth Centre Budapest, 28-29 November 2007. The seminar’s aim was to discuss the role of intercultural learning theory and practice in European youth work and its role in the youth policy and programme of the Council of Europe.

Underlying the invitation were a number of challenging, pressing, intriguing and promising questions, one of which was to explore the relationship between Intercultural learning and Intercultural dialogue.

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## BACKGROUND

Intercultural learning in the Council of Europe began developing over 30 years ago, very much due to the pioneering role of the programme of the European Youth Centre. It can be said to have been fully established in 1995, through the ‘All Different – All Equal’ European youth campaign against racism, antisemitism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Throughout the years, *informal exchange* on the nature and needs of this field of activities has been plentiful; cooperation between the formal education sector of the Council of Europe and the non-formal education sector, represented by the youth field, served to consolidate practices and develop consistent approaches.

Working methods have been progressively developed through the education and training activities run with youth organisations at the

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European youth centres, often resulting in the development of educational materials. Recurrent dialogue has taken place in the growing Trainers' Pool of the Directorate of Youth and Sport, as well as within the intergovernmental cooperation sectors, with visible repercussions also in the cooperation with the European Union. In addition, in relation to individual seminars and other activities, small-scale evaluation has been carried out, mainly through questionnaires. However, for the most part the capitalization from two decades of practical experience has remained unsystematised.

Many factors interplay in today's need for a thorough investigation into the concepts and practices of Intercultural learning.

- ♦ *A different Europe.* Europe of today is very different from what it was 20 years ago. Some parts of this transition have been very painful, others less so. Wars, changes of political systems, new conditions for travelling and taking up residence, new ways of defining who has or doesn't have the right to enter or settle in Europe ...
- ♦ *An enlarged agenda.* Among the recurrent topics treated in European Youth Work activities of today some new keywords have been introduced that reflect features and fears distinctive of the twenty-first century, such as globalisation or terrorism.
- ♦ *New ways of communication.* Whatever the topic, the means of gathering, sharing and spreading information have changed completely through new information technology. Likewise, the ways of making and maintaining contact across all kinds of borders are very different today compared to 20 years ago.
- ♦ *An enlarged international community.* Finally, the framework of the Council of Europe has changed substantially. The number of member

states has grown, from 23 in 1990 to today's 47, as has the diversity of living conditions and experiences represented within this new Europe.

In view of the present engagement from both the European Union and the Council of Europe as a whole, it is very timely to investigate the heritage, challenges and potential within the Council of Europe youth work to forward both its own work and its contribution to the overall, pan-European undertaking. Of particular interest here is the ambition to mainstream intercultural dialogue, and the relation this has to intercultural education, in terms of concept and in the form of activities.

## **Objectives**

In the introduction and call for participants the objectives of the seminar were outlined as follows:

- ♦ *To review* current understanding and practices of intercultural learning in youth work;
- ♦ *To formulate* proposals for furthering the role of intercultural learning in youth work based on agreed criteria and standards;
- ♦ *To contribute* to the conceptual development of the Directorate of Youth and Sports' programmes on intercultural learning, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion;
- ♦ *To promote* cooperation and mutual learning between youth workers and trainers, youth policy experts and education researchers on the concepts and practices of intercultural learning;
- ♦ *To identify* needs for training and research related to intercultural practices of non-formal education.

## **Participants**

The seminar brought together 37 youth workers, trainers in non-formal education, educational experts and researchers and youth policy experts. The vast majority were trainers, most of them with longstanding experience from different activities within the Council of Europe youth cen-

tres, but also some who were quite new within the field of international youth work.

The diversity among the group of participants served well the ambition of the organisers to look at experience in the light of new needs. How do we respond to new challenges, as Rui Gomes asked, without prior knowledge and know-how, without throwing out the baby with the bathwater? Likewise, the presence of new faces and participants from regions that were not in the picture 20 years ago showed a commitment to remain updated on current and future needs within the field of European youth work.

### **Structure of the seminar**

In the invitation it was explicitly stated that the outcome of the meeting had not been defined beforehand. *The seminar was planned as first and foremost an opportunity to debate some of the issues relating to intercultural learning.* Participants were invited to share their questions and concerns without any time pressure, without any expectations of presenting answers or solutions at this stage.

The work of the seminar was framed by input sessions from two experts, Dr Hendrik Otten (IKAB, Institute for Applied Communication Research in Non-formal Education, Bonn) and Dr Gavan Titley (Centre for Media Studies, National University of Ireland, Maynooth), who proposed their responses to some of the questions. Plenary discussions, working groups and other special input sessions then deepened the issues.

### **Contents of the report**

In this introductory chapter some key issues of the seminar are brought to the fore, partly with the help of the working group reports, and partly with reference to the papers and interventions that served as the backbone for the seminar, structuring the vast array of topics touched upon.

In the chapter that follows, a general background of Intercultural learning within the Council of Europe is outlined by Rui Gomes. When facing change and new challenges, it is of particular importance not to lose touch with earlier experiences. Making history a baseline for discussion can serve many purposes. It helps to clarify different interpretations of, in this case, the nature and role of Intercultural education. It helps to insure that change becomes development, not repetition.

In both these senses it also contributes to bridging gaps among participants related to generation as well as to length or type of experience from the field.

This is followed by a very influential text from precisely this history, on the state and relevance of intercultural learning for youth work, yesterday and today. The ‘Ten theses on the correlation between European youth encounters...’ by Hendrik Otten has had a deep impact on the thinking around Intercultural learning. In this chapter a ten-year-old version of his text is presented alongside the author’s own reflections ten years after, concerning which parts are still relevant and which ones need revising. This structure reflects the lecture given by Hendrik Otten during the seminar.

The other major input to the seminar was a lecture by Gavan Titley. His paper, a critical reflection on the concept of culture and its use in intercultural learning in Directorate of Youth and Sports activities, was made available to participants before the seminar and is included in this report. This discussion document, based on an evaluation of the Long term training course (LTTC) on Intercultural Learning and recent research activities, calls for a major re-evaluation of both practice as it has developed, and of the interpretation of underlying concepts, in particular the notion of culture: how we understand it and what we do with it.

The last chapter consists of an essay by Teresa Cunha and Rui Gomes, ‘Against the waste of experiences in Intercultural learning’. The authors’ critical review aims at releasing the potential for social transformation they see in a renewed and updated interpretation of Intercultural learning. In their article they also venture to explore the relationship between intercultural education and intercultural dialogue. The former, they suggest, can be understood as the necessary educational approach to the latter.

The words of conclusion refer back to the question formulated in the very beginning of the seminar: Which ways forward?

How was this question answered?

## **Participants’ expectations**

Participants came with a wide variety of expectations. The morning of the first day started with a group activity in which people were asked to jot down their expectations on flipcharts. In the list that came out of this exercise one could read the following, namely that people wanted to



- ◆ learn more in-depth about the application and new discussions around Intercultural learning (ICL)
- ◆ acquire new skills and methods
- ◆ compare local practices
- ◆ strengthen interpersonal relationships and networking
- ◆ check out experts' opinions, knowledge and experience
- ◆ find out what stage the European debate and thinking on ICL is at
- ◆ investigate the relevance of 'known' methods
- ◆ discuss planning and measuring results of ICL
- ◆ take stock of debate and provoke debate beyond the seminar
- ◆ take part in critical reflection of ICL practice in DYS – does our work stand up to our own principals?
- ◆ get ideas on how to be more effective in impacting on society
- ◆ seek support for a plan for a major research project to compare methods of ICL effectiveness: what works and why?

This diversity bears witness to underlying diversities with regard to several factors, including different lengths of experience in the field, as well as different positions and conditions in everyday work environments. Some participants were more into improving performance, others more into critically challenging both theory and practice.

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## THE NEED FOR RECURRENT REFLECTION

Hendrik Otten centred his presentation, *The role of intercultural learning in European youth work today*, around the 'ten theses' that he first introduced in an essay written many years ago. Participants were invited to read, before arrival, a 1997 version of this essay. Hendrik Otten could have referred back to this reading, claiming his ten theses as a recipe, stating, "they have been tried and tested, are approved of and widely used; you just go on." But he didn't say that. Instead he pointed to the need for revision, conveying as his message that "this map is outdated. We can still build on it, but only after thorough reflection."

Hendrik Otten's choice to depart from an existing paper and comment on its updating is interesting both for the contents of the suggestions, and still more maybe in that it exemplifies a method, an attitude – underlining *the need for recurrent reflection*. The description of the seminar as being the starting point for a systematic process, rather than an isolated event, interplays nicely with this approach.

Many of the topics brought up during the working group session were in line with Otten's thoughts, and confirmed the need to view and review practice in relation to a framework that in itself undergoes constant change. In their notes one of the working groups

*... agreed that Intercultural learning is still relevant and that the need for Intercultural learning might be even bigger now than before. With the current 'culture of fear' and the pressing global issues, there are many challenges in need of being addressed. (Working Group 1)*

They also formulated a number of questions related to the lives and world views of young people in Europe today:

*What about local communities in a global context?  
What does 'community' mean to young people?  
Is there a concept of community amongst young people in Europe today?  
Where do young people meet?  
What does 'area', 'group' or 'class' mean for different behaviours and choices?  
The 'school community' - is that a microcosm of society?  
'Or is 'community' a place on the street, or places where extra curricula activities take place?  
What impact does globalisation have for Intercultural learning?  
And what about communication systems across the world? When small villages are now connected with the world - is this then Intercultural learning?  
(WG1)*

Hendrik Otten's essay touches on both practical arrangements around youth encounters, as well as on our presumptions about what these arrangements may or may not change in young peoples' conception of themselves and others. For instance, he warns the reader, "contact between people from different cultures does not automatically lead to improved mutual understanding". Likewise, he puts question marks after assumptions that tourism should promote long-term changes in attitude, or that so-called cultural proximity should pave the way for mutual understanding. It could as well work the other way round, in prejudices being strengthened.

So, if brief encounters or the mere crossing of national borders do not in themselves carry any specific value, or guarantee any specific change, then what do we do? One has to look, Otten writes, at the conditions under which the encounters take place.

---

## THE ART OF LEARNING AND GROWING

If we cannot guarantee a certain outcome from any one particular practical setting, if we cannot know for sure what will follow from a particular intervention, then what *do* we do? Dr. Otten's conclusion is that we must start with our own everyday life. This is probably not a controversial statement for educators in general, but it does become considerably more complicated in relation to intercultural education. For most participants, intercultural activities in and by themselves constitute an exemption from everyday life, in a very positive sense. And yet, they mustn't be so different that they disconnect themselves from applicability once back home again.

One writer that has reflected deeply upon the art of learning and growing is the late Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński (1932–2007). In his book *Travels with Herodotus* he relates the story of his own coming into being both as a writer and as a reflecting individual (world citizen, I would say). Kapuściński's point of departure is Poland; as a child he experienced the Second World War, and as a young man he lived in the closed post-war society. Kapuściński remembers his early travels as novice reporter in Poland:

*My route sometimes took me to villages along the border. But this happened infrequently. For the closer one got to a border, the emptier grew the land and the fewer people one encountered. This emptiness increased the mystery of these regions. I was struck, too, by how silent the border zone was. This mystery and quiet attracted and intrigued me. I was tempted to see what lay beyond, on the other side. I wondered what one experiences when one crosses the border. What does one feel? What does one think? It must be a moment of great emotion, agitation, tension. What is it like, on the other side? It must certainly be – different. But what does “different” mean? What does it look like? What does it resemble? Maybe it resembles nothing that I know, and thus is inconceivable, unimaginable? And so my greatest desire, which gave me no peace, which tormented and tantalized, was actually quite modest: I wanted one thing only – the moment, the act, the simple fact of crossing the border. To cross it and come right back – that, I thought, would be entirely sufficient, would satisfy my quite inexplicable yet acute psychological hunger. (p. 9)*

Sooner than he had ever dreamed of, young Kapuściński does get to cross a border – his paper sends him to India(!). As a present for the road, the editor-in-chief gives him Herodotus' *The Histories* – from this moment

on, his life-long reading companion. Herodotus, from Halikarnassos in ancient Greece (today's Bodrum, Turkey) is 2,500 years his senior. Still, when Kapuściński describes his interpretation of Herodotus mission, it seems very close to his own:

*Herodotus travels in order to satisfy a child's question: Where do the ships on the horizon come from? And is what we see with our own eyes not the edge of the world? No. So there are still other worlds? What kind? When the child grows up, he will want to get to know them. But it would be better if he didn't grow up completely, if he stayed always in some small measure a child. Only children pose important questions and truly want to discover things.*

*Herodotus learns about his worlds with the rapturous enthusiasm of a child. His most important discovery? That there are many worlds. And that each is different.*

*Each is important.*

*And that one must learn about them, because these other worlds, these other cultures, are mirrors in which we can see ourselves, thanks to which we understand ourselves better – for we cannot define our own identity until having confronted that of others, as comparison.*

*And that is why Herodotus, having made this discovery – that the cultures of others are a mirror in which we can examine ourselves in order to understand ourselves better – every morning, tirelessly, again and again, sets out his journey. (pp. 263-264)*

Kapuściński's greatness does not stem from the number of travels, borders crossed or distances covered. Rather it lies in his attitude, in how he takes in the world in its details and in its everyday appearance. The description he makes of his ancient friend and role-model is not very far from his own early experience and lifelong attitude:

*Herodotus lives fully; he is not bothered by the lack of the telephone or the airplane, nor does he worry about not having a bicycle. These machines will appear only thousands of years later – and so what? It does not occur to him that such things might have been useful to him, perhaps because he manages excellently without them. His world, his life have their own strength, their own undiminishing and self-sufficient energy. He senses it, and it gives him wings. (pp. 219-200)*

So, to go back to the agenda of the seminar: arrangements around youth encounters and their possible outcomes. As Hendrik Otten underlines,

we cannot rely on the practical settings alone – we have to dig deeply into the attitudes and ideologies that infuse our actions, and that colour the outcome of our undertakings. This in turn makes it vital to have an ongoing exchange of experiences amongst everybody involved.

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## WHAT'S CULTURE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

“Culture is the distinctive feature of humankind”, “Culture is what unites people, to each other and to a particular history”, “Culture is the essence of society” – there is no end to the number of clichés aiming at defining and describing the concept of culture. But independently of the wordings, everyone will agree on the principle: culture matters.

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**The single most important fact to state is that diversity has its place within each society.**

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Maybe culture could even be described as an act of resistance towards the contemporary tendency to reduce each and every one of us to being a consumer, identifying with memories, people, habits

– rather than with bought objects that pile up around us while contributing to global warming? It is possible that this holds some truth, at the same time as it is a romantic description that helps justify differences between living conditions: affluence for some and absence for others.

The way culture needs to be treated within the field of European youth work is different also from the way Kapuściński deals with it as a travelling journalist. Looked upon from the perspective of the European Youth Centres, diversity and other cultures are not to be sought or found on the other side of national borders. Segregation may have it that there are at times physical divisions of space. But the single most important fact to state is that diversity has its place within each society. Diversity needs to be recognised as an intrinsic quality of each and every society, not a difference between isolated units of different societies, countries or peoples.

There is reason for thorough reflection! The main source of inspiration for a critical revision of the concept of culture came from Gavan Titley, whose essay *Plastic, Political and Contingent* was one of the main reasons for the seminar coming into being. His reflections sparked an in-depth, both philosophical and self-critical discussion of which we have only seen the start.

The concepts made use of in Intercultural learning are not random, said Gavan Titley. They reflect a certain view of what is important, and

what is problematic. In his presentation, he put to question both which concepts and keywords Intercultural learning focuses on, and the dimensions of human interaction and co-existence that are consequently made invisible. Why, he asked, does Camp X-Ray (hereby referring to the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, Cuba) have an intercultural policy? Why this, in a setting where prisoners are deprived of everything else? Put forward as a right assigned, what does this policy in practice hide, excuse and obscure?

Gavan Titley elaborated further on what he described as the conceptual and educational inadequacies in the way Intercultural learning is practised. We have got stuck with essentialising and freezing identities, Titley maintains – wooden, apolitical and universally fixed, rather than plastic, political and contingent, he writes in his essay. And, what is more, this in turn contributes to the dilution of the political nature of youth work.

So, what we have is a combination of theoretical and practical shortcomings. The ideological goal for Intercultural learning is clearly present if we look at descriptions such as Intercultural learning being “the maximum common denominator between human rights education, anti-racist education, international cooperation and a sense for social justice” (as it was formulated in the invitation to the seminar). Still, if this ambition is converted into action in a way that conveys a shallow and naïve message – then one might rightly ask what has been gained or lost. If my message is, ‘yes, I see your difference, I choose to call it cultural, pay my respects and leave things as they are’, it is something completely different, compared to other possible reactions. If, for instance, I would have called the same difference by another name, labelling it social and/or economic, and acted for a change, for a more equal distribution of goods and rights – this would result in other kinds of relations and outcomes.

It is worth mentioning in this context that others too have the same struggle. The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue stated in its draft version that it “inevitably ventures beyond the cultural into the economic and social domains”. What this ‘venturing beyond’ actually implies is, however, not elaborated in any depth. In the final version of this document this statement is missing. There is another passage that touches upon the more crude conditions of life. It reads:

*There are many barriers to intercultural dialogue. Some of these are the result of the difficulty in communicating in several languages. But others concern power and politics: discrimination, poverty and exploitation – experiences*

‘White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. *Living Together As Equals*’. Draft version of 10 September 2007. DGIV-WP (2007) 3.

*which often bear particularly heavily on persons belonging to disadvantaged and marginalised groups – are structural barriers to dialogue.* (‘White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. *Living Together As Equals in Dignity.*’ CM(2008) 30 final 2 May 2008. p. 12)

Gavan Titley was not the only one to reflect on the role of culture. Both before and during the seminar many people voiced their warnings against simplistic uses of this tricky concept. Rui Gomes did, by reminding us that “not all diversity is cultural, not all discriminations are based on culture”, and by concluding that culture cannot be separated from the living conditions of people. In other words, intercultural competences are important but they are not enough to address all the challenges and situations that youth workers and young people are confronted with. Working group 1 tried to relate culture to life, by noting that:

*[I]ntercultural learning, the way it is practised, is based on nationality. But what about other dimensions: gender, subcultures, sexuality, poverty, rural/urban ...? We are focusing too narrowly around nationality. This is Intercultural learning at a practical grass roots level. (WG1)*

Working group 2 began their exchange by exploring the relationship between the three terms intercultural learning, intercultural dialogue and intercultural education.

*Most participants viewed intercultural exchanges and encounters as a first step of intercultural learning, and considered intercultural dialogue an advanced quality of life in today’s multicultural societies and a result of intercultural learning. It was agreed, however, that intercultural learning must be rooted in real-life situations: without such a local context, intercultural learning becomes meaningless and arbitrary. Participants noted:*

- ♦ *the limits of intercultural processes – be it learning, education or dialogue – in that none of them can resolve systematic dysfunctions of societies, such as political or economical discrimination and social exclusion;*
- ♦ *the risk of intercultural learning to support the culturalisation of people – the perception of individuals as tokens of their culture, and the limitation of individuals to their culture;*
- ♦ *the danger of intercultural dialogue becoming a dialogue about cultures rather than a dialogue between cultures; and*
- ♦ *the necessity of educators to be aware of and able to deal with the historical contexts, political relevance and socio-cultural implications of intercultural*

*learning and dialogue and the different concepts connected to these terms.*  
(WG 2)

Working group 3 suggested that trainers who facilitate intercultural learning activities be reconceptualised as political educators.

*They need to increase their knowledge about the world and increase their self-awareness of where they stand and what attitudes and ideologies/values they follow. The focus needs to shift to ‘learning to live culturally’ instead of ‘in cultures’ with artificial boundaries. This implies a responsibility of the trainer to know what they know, where this knowledge comes from and what it means for the work they do. It also implies a responsibility of the Council of Europe to ensure the quality of the trainers they work with.* (WG 3)

Working group 4 discussed possible ways to promote progress and suggested an emphasis on the critical literacy of young people:

*Critical literacy will support young people explore different theories, concepts, approaches, practices and their implication at micro and macro levels of communities and individual lives, based on their understanding to take their own position. Critical literacy will make it possible to shift, revise and question one’s values and stances.* (WG 4)

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## **HOW CAN THEORY AND PRACTICE REINFORCE ONE ANOTHER?**

The majority of participants at the seminar represented the practitioners’ side. They were people actively involved in actually performing youth work. Those who were newer in the field were looking for methods and contacts – wanting to develop their skills. Those who had longer experience voiced questions from a different angle: are we advancing or going round in circles? Their concerns had more of a research perspective, saying that “we need to analyse both our ways of thinking and our practices”. There was a general consensus that research is needed, and that exchange in both directions can be beneficial:

*The role of research does and should play a role in influencing Intercultural learning at policy, academic and other levels. We should enable practice to inform policy.* (WG1)



There were also comments acknowledging the difficulties to overcome in a fruitful dialogue:

*There is need for an improved dialogue between researchers, youth-workers and policy makers. The dialogue between researchers and youth-workers in particular needs better facilitation and help in translation of theories and concepts into practise. (WG 3)*

### **Why is it that research and action as perspectives so easily feed antagonistic feelings?**

In working group 5, the one that worked under the headline ‘Bringing research and action together’, participants stated that research should serve young people as well as youth workers and that it should also benefit funders and officials working on youth policy and strategies. They identified different types of research: academic research, policy research, and practitioner’s research – for the sake of assessment and project evaluation. Sometimes, according to the group’s discussion, practitioners themselves conduct this latter form, but they do not call it research. Having said that, the group also formulated a number of straight forward questions, some of them quite controversial:

*Who needs research?*

*Who understands and uses research?*

*How can practice results inform further research and a renewal of theory?*

*Where do research and action meet?*

*Are they in equal positions?*

*Who initiates these meetings?*

*What about the quality of the research? (WG 5)*

Other groups, too, touched upon the research-action relationship, but from a slightly different angle. In their discussion on Intercultural learning in European training activities, Working group 4 concluded that:

*the trend of being ‘anti-theory’ must be rejected and potential cooperation between researchers and practitioners should be enforced. Training courses should be less technical and tool-oriented, and should aim to create critical thinkers. The competence of trainers to self-assess their learning needs and design self learning development plans must become an element in the training of trainers. (WG 4)*

When describing the nature of youth work, the same group stated that:

*... youth work is nothing less than other kinds of work. Therefore, it requires from those doing it as much professionalism as in other fields: being up-to-date with the latest discussions in academic fields, such as theories and concepts in what concerns our daily practice, along with actively reflecting on what that implies for our work.*(WG 4)

Why is it that research and action as perspectives so easily feed antagonistic feelings, about those who do not know what it means to step back and reflect, or who do not know what reality is like? – to put it bluntly. This kind of polarisation is definitely not something special for this seminar; it is more a rule than an exception, but *why* is this so?

The answer probably lies in the differences in positions and conditions that characterise the roles of practitioners and researchers respectively, a topic that has been treated by sociologist Hassan Hosseini.

Generally speaking, says Hosseini, the two processes of research and practice often run parallel with each other but not hand in hand with each other. Hosseini has identified three major barriers which obstruct the cooperation between researchers and practitioners, namely

- ♦ dissonance in the nature of work
- ♦ dissonance in the cycle of work
- ♦ dissonance in the conditions of work.

Hosseini 2001,  
*Reflections on some  
barriers to the co-operation  
of practitioners  
and researchers.*  
[http://www.mkc.  
botkyrka.se/english/  
barriers.htm](http://www.mkc.botkyrka.se/english/barriers.htm)

Practitioners work under a constant pressure to act. Most of the time they have to deliver answers that can be categorised as either ‘yes’ or ‘no’. And as far as the time factor goes, practitioners can seldom wait, or postpone a reaction or an answer. In this respect it differs little whether the practitioner is a youth work leader, or a civil servant working in a public office.

Researchers, on the other hand, have to withhold simple answers, even when this implies not living up to expectations from partners outside the field of research. They must also refrain from lending a helping hand, or giving advice, when support for this is lacking in the material. A researcher who interferes in practice risks the reputation of research, of the informants’ right to remain anonymous. Hosseini continues:

*The work of a practitioner is not naturally devoid of intellectual reflections.  
Every act of decision making is based on reflection on the previous decisions,*

*context of the decision making and its consequences. Depending on the context it can be based also on the studies existing within the area or on the experiences of the other practitioners. It is also usual to build decisions on collective discussions or meetings. But after all these reflections a practitioner has to decide whether s/he will give a positive or a negative answer to the question. To answer partly positively or partly negatively does not suit the work of a practitioner. It is possible to postpone decision making to the near future, but it is almost impossible to forget it forever. In the realm of practical work 'certainty' is a law and every reflection is to end in a dummy variable: yes or no. The situation is the same when the question is of a type which does not have a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Or at least it does not have such an answer within the 'control limits' of the practitioner. With all consciousness about the impossibility of such an answer, the practitioner is expected to choose between 'yes' and 'no' alternatives, by mere speculation if not with the help of reasoning. Vacillation between answers does not have place in the world of the practitioner.*

*Due to this nature of the work there is usually an inclination in the practitioners to make an adviser or a consultant out of the researcher(s) whom they are co-operating with. They like to share their personal 'ordeal' of decision making with a partner who is assumed to have control over the situation. This is especially the case when the question does not have a clear answer or does not have it within the 'control limits' of the practitioner. In such a case the task of "doing miracle" is projected on the intellectual capacity of the researcher. A researcher who shirks such a role is believed to have nothing to add to the outcome of co-operation. (Ibid.)*

On the dissonance of the time cycle Hosseini emphasises the importance of different time perspectives. Practitioners, he states, usually work in short cycles.

*During this short period of time a practitioner usually does not have the opportunity for sufficient study and reflection on the contexts and the consequences of his decision making. S/he is to build her/his decision making, at least partly, on the former procedures existing in the reservoir of organisation (s) and/or on her/his wishful speculations. The feedback from other processes may warn the practitioner on the validity or falsity of his decision making. But this happens only when the consequences of her/his decision making have joined other processes and have gone out of her/his control. Such warnings help, of course, a practitioner in her/his later decision makings, but they can hardly bring the process back under the control of the practitioner. Unlike the practitioner, a researcher builds her/his work over a longer span of time; mainly from a*

*year to three or four years and seldom shorter or longer. During this period, a researcher has the opportunity to study the background and context of her/his project and enrich his experiences with those of others. He also has the opportunity to go back or forth by collecting new experiences and to modify the results by these new experiences. (Ibid.)*

As a result of this difference in conditions,

*the researcher is not inclined to take the risk of falsity or inaccuracy that is embedded in the practitioner's rapid decision makings. S/he is inclined, on the contrary, to exhaust his time for riper and more accurate responses. (Ibid.)*

The practitioners Hosseini looks at in his writing are primarily civil servants. The laws and regulations that circumscribe their actions and activities are considerably different from those regulating the work of a European youth leader. Still, the social processes described by Hosseini have relevance for our discussion:

*The work of a practitioner is constrained, directly or indirectly, by those of others spreading throughout the organisation. It is partly through this constraint that an organisation fulfils its general objective(s). This constraint becomes still more restricting if the organisation is in direct contact with its environment. Every practitioner who is working in an organisation is always bound to adapt her/his work to those of the others, whether these others are superior, inferior or colleagues at the same level. Without this adaptation, the work of the organisation ends in chaos. (Ibid.)*

However different the conditions, systematic reflection is urgently needed for all practitioners. Likewise, researchers within social sciences need working links to practice of various kinds. So, however complicated a dialogue might be at times, it cannot be regarded as anything but an investment.

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## **EVALUATIONS AS A TOOL FOR REFLECTION AND GROWTH**

In relation to the discussion on research, the question of evaluation came up. The need was formulated, but with one exception there was no real experience from good working methods, and the ideas on 'how' were

very vague. There were also doubts about whether evaluation within this field is at all possible:

*Evaluation of Intercultural learning – it is qualitative rather than quantitative; it cannot be counted numerically. Intercultural learning is a process not an end result – does it or can it have outcomes? (WG1)*

Participant Steve Powell however, introduced to the seminar a wealth of experience from the field of actually evaluating ‘soft data’. Very convincingly, he spoke about ‘evaluations as a tool

for reflection and growth.’ In his presentation, Powell said something highly important about results and answers:

**If you do not dare to draw preliminary conclusions, others will, and they may be less to the point than you could have been.**

*Don’t be afraid of things or facts or statements that you cannot write in stone. Allow yourself to make tentative judgements. Because if you do not dare to*

*draw preliminary conclusions, others will, and they may be less to the point than you could have been.*

He then said something equally important about questions arising in relation to evaluations. Having an evaluation as a starting point for a discussion paves the way for truly very advanced questions and discussions, the meaning of concepts, the interpretation of outcomes – and anything in between. In my view, what he actually did was to open a common ground for academics and practitioners to meet for mutually rewarding exchange.

But for an activity to be the possible target of a fruitful evaluation, it has to meet some basic criteria. Of course there is always a continuum between the perfectly structured universe and total chaos. And there is no guarantee that the most challenging activities, with the most interesting outcomes, are those that have the highest degree of structure at the outset. Still, the better an activity, and its goals, if described at the outset – the more there is to learn at the end of the cycle. As formulated by Seneca, “If a man knows not what harbour he seeks, any wind is the right wind.”

Many find it useful to adapt the so-called S.M.A.R.T. method, an acronym of five important dimensions of an undertaking for it to be open to evaluation. It should (ideally) be: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Trackable (sometimes instead Time-bound).

Equally relevant to our discussion is another way of characterising the types of goals one could aim for. If we look upon projects related to influencing a target group, it can be fruitful to make a distinction between goals on different levels. Before we can expect to actually influence the actions of people, they have to pass the stages of having information, knowledge, insight, changed values, changed attitudes and, eventually, changed behaviour. Having this ‘ladder’ at the back of our minds when planning a project could probably also be helpful for setting S.M.A.R.T. goals.

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## **DON'T THROW THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATH WATER**

“What we lack is the courage to understand everything that we know, and to draw the consequences from this understanding.” We have a heritage to build on and challenges that need to be met! This was the message from Rui Gomes and Teresa Cunha as they set out to discuss the experiences and future role of intercultural learning. Intercultural learning, they state in their article, can be understood as the necessary educational approach to intercultural dialogue. Because of the potential it carries for social transformation we need to restate its key premises and explore its current challenges.

The definition of intercultural learning that Gomes and Cunha put forward sees it as “a process of social education aimed at promoting a positive relationship between people and groups from different cultural backgrounds” (Equipo Claves 1992:82). The recognition of the correlation between personal/individual learning/action and group/collective learning/action of this definition, they put it, makes it a very valid approach for intercultural dialogue and particularly for a critical ownership of the intercultural dialogue speech by practitioners of intercultural learning and intercultural education.

In their critical review – which is nevertheless very devoted to a mission they truly believe in – they discuss a number of features they regard as essential to the concept and the practice of intercultural learning.

Tolerance of ambiguity, being the first one, is a matter of educating our minds and social behaviour to the ‘unknown’ as a positive cultural research browser in order to enlarge our capacities of dialogue and living together.

Diatopical hermeneutics, the second dimension, aims to explicitly question ethnocentrism and its power to become normative. It can

serve as a defence against the monopolistic ‘hijacking’ of positive human values.

The third dimension is the one that recognises intercultural learning as a tool for social change. But for change to happen, empathy and solidarity need to be embraced and practised.

Making intercultural dialogue one of its core missions, the Council of Europe gives it a prominent role and acknowledges the need for consistent structures and policies for exchange to occur. But, say Gomes and Cunha, for intercultural dialogue to be genuine and purposeful, we also need to take into consideration the power of language and power relations in general.

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## **WHICH WAYS FORWARD? – WORDS OF CONCLUSION**

The topic of this seminar was formulated in a way that ends with a question: “Which ways forward?” Looking back at the event from behind the computer, one reflection comes naturally: Was this question answered? Or rather, *how* was it answered?

Was the group more informed as it split, some to join a trainers’ pool seminar, others to travel back home? Or was it maybe more confused? And either way, was this a good or a bad outcome? In my concluding words as general rapporteur, I borrowed an example brought up by participant Steve Powell, who asked:

*If we knew to a 70 percent level what intercultural education was all about when we came, and leave thinking that we understand maybe 30 percent, is this then a failure or a success?*

In the exchange of thoughts, the seminar touched upon many things with a potential to reduce confusion, without reducing the complexity of the issues at stake. Again, one can ask what kind of trace this left with participants: a feeling of freedom, having had the opportunity to reflect? A feeling of frustration: how do I apply this to my everyday context? A feeling of fear: I will never again dare to say anything on this subject? My own, preliminary judgement was that the seminar left its participants comfortably confused with inputs and discussions, and at the same time infused with new energy to continue taking part in the future development of the field of intercultural learning.

After the session in which the Working groups presented their reports, the following points were summarised by Annette Schneider:

- ♦ *Intercultural learning should have a life-long learning focus.*
- ♦ *Intercultural learning should promote critical literacy, thinking and analysis by all involved.*
- ♦ *Intercultural learning should be acknowledged alongside other forms of education.*
- ♦ *Intercultural learning should always be contextualised.*
- ♦ *Research is an area that should be further explored and should meet with action.*

Some of the substantial and very positive outcomes of the seminar as a whole can be summarised as follows:

- ♦ The very fact that reflection and critique from several points of view resulted in an invitation to this seminar signals openness towards precisely this: critique, reflection, capitalisation and progress. Openness in this sense is truly an investment.
- ♦ The willingness to seek dialogue between different stakeholders within the field of European youth work, not least between practitioners and researchers. During the seminar important steps were taken to pave the way for recurring and mutual exchange between practice and research.
- ♦ The need for evaluation, alongside the concerns voiced about whether evaluation at all is possible, was given very constructive input: in the short term, maybe in the ways course evaluations are put together and used; in the long term, hopefully, in the way more scientific and systematic evaluation is included as a dimension from the very beginning of every major undertaking.

Let me conclude with a very practical, yet symbolic reflection on the language factor. The seminar was a monolingual one, with no translators, or headsets. But this monolingual character is true only as long as we remain on the surface.

Under the surface there is a tremendous amount of translation taking place, at many levels: on the spot, in that many of participants listen and translate what we hear of presentations and other input, into our own



first language; and then, if we want to comment or ask anything, we formulate again our input in a language other than English.

Beyond this, there is also the long term task of translating theory into practice, the Budapest setting into everyday one. “How do I transmit this, and make it meaningful to the young people that I work with?” someone asked. Had this seminar been bilingual, in say English-French, or English-Russian, some difficulties would have disappeared, but much would have remained equally complicated. Different mother tongues, different contexts, different focuses: all these are factors that complicate interaction. These unequal points of departure, however, are not only shortcomings but also potential assets. In the particular context if this seminar concepts discussed are vague by nature. Long before there is any talk of translation they are in need of interpretation. Precisely for this reason, we could profit enormously from the linguistic diversity that is at the constant collective disposal of the Council of Europe Youth sector. What connotations does a certain concept have in this or that language? I think that systematic investigations of this kind could be very helpful in getting a more in-depth understanding of the key concepts that intercultural learning is centred around.

# **In the Background of the Seminar... Outlining 20 Years of Experience**

*Rui Gomes*

## **The mainstreaming of intercultural learning in European youth work**

**I**ntercultural learning has been a dominant background element in the European youth work scene for more than 20 years. Whether understood – in its social dimension – as an aim and means for the reduction or change of prejudice, or – in a stricter didactic dimension – as an approach necessary for learning to take place in multicultural environments, intercultural learning has been almost like the mantra in European youth work.

Very much under the influence of the educational practice of the European Youth Centre, intercultural learning also became part of the objectives and, ultimately, criteria for European youth projects under the Youth for Europe programme and its successive ‘Youth’ programmes. Hendrik Otten’s ‘Ten theses on the correlation between European youth encounters, intercultural learning and demands on full and part-time staff in these encounters’, provided much of the conceptual framework for it.

Within the Council of Europe’s youth sector, intercultural learning in youth work practice was especially developed through the long-term training courses in European youth work – for whose projects it was both an objective and a quality criterion. It soon became understood as representing the essence of the European Youth Centre’s educational approach: recognising and addressing prejudice, combating aggressive and exclusive forms of nationalism, developing a sense of European dimension or identifying the competences necessary for youth workers active in inter-/multi-cultural environments. For many players in European youth work, intercultural learning represented the maximum common denominator between human rights education, anti-racist education, international cooperation and a sense for social justice. At

a certain moment, it looked as if intercultural learning would replace peace education, international/ist education (as practised in some communist states) and development education, taking the best of each other's objectives and addressing the deficient areas in the practices (and ideological misuses) of these educational concepts.

The 1995 'All Different – All Equal' European youth campaign against racism, antisemitism, xenophobia and intolerance would see the political and educational consecration of intercultural learning in the Council of Europe. The Education Pack 'All Different - All Equal' attempted to bridge the probably artificial gap between intercultural education and intercultural learning, bridging at the same time some old divides between formal and non-formal education. The Education Pack sought also to place the emphasis on a holistic dimension of intercultural learning/education that would go beyond the personal learning but would also address the context for education (a futile debate nowadays, because of course learning is not just learning about but it is also learning for). The literature and experiences in the field of intercultural education, often understood as relating first and foremost to formal education involving 'nationals' and 'migrants', were very rich but often related only to the classroom (or school, at best) learning environments and approaches.

## **Matters of breadth and depth**

The risks and limits of intercultural education were already clearly perceived at the time. The literature of the long-term training courses, in particular, testifies to the awareness that not all diversity is cultural, not all discriminations are based on culture, and that culture cannot be separated from the living conditions of people. In other words, intercultural competences are very important but they are not enough to address all the challenges and situations that youth workers and young people are confronted with. The limits of intercultural learning/education are also the limits of non-formal education.

As a common aim to the practitioners of European youth programmes and their decision makers, intercultural learning seemed to have been mainstreamed in youth work. Discussions were often centred on the degree of depth of intercultural learning rather than on the principle itself. How much of 'cultural' did intercultural learning need to take into account? Was it enough to have an awareness of different cultural perceptions and how they influence communication and cooperation on the European (youth) scene? But if intercultural learning

was more than that, why place the emphasis on intercultural learning? How can the nationalisation of culture in an international environment be avoided? How can we make sure that the ‘intercultural evenings’ in international activities do not become a parody of what intercultural learning is about?

Very probably, the debates on intercultural learning were also marked by the very different needs of expressing and legitimising cultural identities across Europe in the 1990s. The second European Youth Week (Bratislava, 1992), was a particular moment where three concepts of intercultural learning (or what was understood of it) would come into contact: a global cultural dimension (coming out of development and solidarity education), an identity youth dimension (youth as an expression of both national culture and [new] democratic culture) and the educational dimension, which tended to recognise a certain legitimacy in all the processes, but emphasised the individual learning aspects while being supported by a learning multicultural group. The three – and many other approaches – have since coexisted more or less peacefully.

Still, while the coexistence of diverse forms of methods and practices is normal in non-formal education, the high level of expectations placed on intercultural learning (political, social, educational) has also led to disappointments about how it was practised, if not taught. As with other educational approaches and theories, intercultural learning has particularly suffered from the confusion between objectives, contents, methods and techniques. The often stated and perceived confusion of intercultural learning with creative group activities such as simulations and role play, has sometimes resulted in its reduction to a method or technique for group work.

A need for clarification had clearly emerged, stimulated also by the re-emergence of intercultural education as a way to bridge social and educational gaps between minorities and majorities. The concept of intercultural education implicit to the Education Pack ‘All Different - All Equal’, intercultural learning as a process of social education aimed at promoting a positive relationship between people and groups from different cultural backgrounds, was developed against other concepts and practices, where the notion of decoding cultural behaviour was sometimes more emphasised. The efforts for normalisation and democratisation of intercultural

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**As with other educational approaches and theories, intercultural learning has particularly suffered from the confusion between objectives, contents, methods and techniques.**

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learning continued with the publication by the Partnership (on training) between the European Commission and the Council of Europe of T-Kit (training kit) on intercultural learning in 2001.

## **Intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue**

Meanwhile, the developments within the Council of Europe, reflecting world events, started giving primacy to human rights education

**... that we may not  
possess all the truth(s).  
In today's world,  
this is probably  
as revolutionary  
as you can get.**

in what used to be mostly the realm of intercultural learning/education. Despite the assurance by human rights education practitioners (e.g. in 'Compass') that human rights education ought to coexist with intercultural learning, the concern of intercultural learning legitimising cultural relativism has always been present. The fact that the concerns reflected narrow understandings of intercultural learning and phobias and concerns

about multiculturalism and interculturalism in Europe does not put to question their relevance.

Events completely beyond the control of European youth workers would further contribute to assign new roles to cultures, sometimes elevated to the rank of civilisations. In the wars against terror, we would not only risk sacrificing universal human rights but also one of the very fundamental assumptions of intercultural learning: that all cultures have a similar basic intrinsic value. Cultural relativism got a further boost by the formidably publicised (e.g. in this very document) 'clash of civilizations' anticipation.

The institutional responses to this have been to place emphasis on the role of dialogue and cooperation over antagonism. In the Council of Europe, the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government held in 2005 emphasised the role of the organisation in marrying cultural diversity and social cohesion through intercultural dialogue. A White Paper on intercultural dialogue is drafted. The European Union dedicated 2008 as the Year for Intercultural Dialogue.

Intercultural learning should naturally be part of the educational contents and approaches for intercultural dialogue and, together with human rights education, respond to the dilemmas resulting from terrorism and the more or less global responses to it. Instead of univocal understandings of the word, intercultural dialogue proposes a less simple

but also richer approach that ultimately considers that the other or the others could actually (also) be right – tolerance of ambiguity - and that this assumption can be made not only because of the (possible) implicit assumption that we are “more right” than the others, but that actually ‘we’ may (also) be wrong – or even that both might be right. Or in better terms, that we may not possess all the truth(s). In today’s world, this is probably as revolutionary as you can get.

### **How political and how contingent?**

There is no doubt that global events also had an impact on the understanding of intercultural learning within the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Youth and Sport and how it is perceived and practised. Intercultural learning went as far as meriting a long-term training course (2003-2004). And it was in the evaluation of that course that one of the most lucid critiques of intercultural learning was made. In ‘Plastic, Political and Contingent – Culture and Intercultural Learning in DYS activities’, Gavan Tittley analyses some of the conceptual problems and inadequacies which resulted in the situation that the “dominant approaches to intercultural learning have become irredeemably weakened”. The paper also proposes several questions regarding the role of intercultural learning in training and training in intercultural learning. Despite its many youth activities with a strong focus on intercultural learning and dialogue – including Euro-Mediterranean youth activities carried out within the framework of the Partnership on Youth and the recent ‘All Different – All Equal’ campaign – the call for the review of the practice of intercultural learning in European youth activities has not really been responded to. Some of these questions are:

- ◆ What are the key concepts and functions of intercultural learning that should be preserved and explored further?
- ◆ What is the main role of intercultural learning in European youth work today?
- ◆ What are the understandings of the role of culture in intercultural learning theory, and what are their possible drawbacks?
- ◆ How explicit should intercultural learning be in European youth training courses?

- ♦ How can the practices of intercultural learning in non-formal education for the purpose of intercultural dialogue be integrated and developed?
- ♦ How can a critique of intercultural dialogue and intercultural learning that is constructive and takes into account their potential for social transformation be developed?
- ♦ What is the articulation between intercultural learning, human rights education and social cohesion?
- ♦ How can the Council of Europe's youth sector contribute to the educational needs raised by intercultural dialogue?
- ♦ What should be done to ensure more regular cooperation between youth worker training activities and educational research in the area of intercultural learning and intercultural competence?

Within the work priorities of the Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport, the Youth Programme for Human Rights Education and Intercultural Dialogue provides a unique framework where these and other questions should be debated. The seminar of experts is one of the responses to that.

# TEN THESES

## on the correlation between European youth work, intercultural learning and the qualification and professionalisation demands on full and part-time staff working in such contexts

*Hendrik Otten*

### Preliminary remarks

In 1990, I published a first version of the ‘Ten theses on the correlation of European youth encounters, intercultural learning and demands on full and part-time staff’ in the reference book *Internationale Jugendarbeit. Interkulturelles Lernen*<sup>1</sup>. Some further publications and reflections in English and French followed.

Starting in 1997, a revised version was published in several languages. That version remained unchanged between 1997 and 2007. In November 2007, the Council of Europe held a seminar at the European Youth Centre in Budapest. The topic was “Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work: Which Ways Forward?”. I was asked to speak about “The Role of Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work Today” and to challenge the 1997 theses by relating them to contemporary situations and developments.

The following paper is an attempt to revise the “old” theses<sup>2</sup> against the backdrop of recent social and political developments and, without foregoing their character as theses, to reformulate them in view of the demands this author considers important for high quality professional intercultural youth work at European level. This is no easy task considering we are dealing with nearly 20 years of development at European level. The following provides a brief overview of some of those I consider key<sup>3</sup>.

European youth work today consists of much more than youth encounters. Demands on European youth work emanate from the context that influences non-formal education. Expectations have grown. European youth work is supposed to be of clear additional benefit to the young people taking part, and there is increased demand for recognition of the insights they acquire during their experiences in non-formal learning settings, including of the contribution such experiences make to improving



social integration, employability and the active European citizenship of the young people concerned. In the context of the European Union's "Lifelong Learning Strategy", European youth work is expected to contribute to achieving the 8 key competences, thereby positioning itself as a key instrument for the attainment of the strategies goals.

The political conditions under which all of this is taking place in Europe have changed greatly since 1990.

The European Union has enlarged to encompass member states with very different democratic traditions and, resulting from these, with different attitudes towards democratic forms of participation, which become manifest in the concepts of youth policy and youth work being developed and practised in the different countries.

Deliberations on new youth policy strategies and corresponding education and training concepts, thus, require an analysis of these changes and developments – both positive and negative.

The discussions at the seminar in Budapest provided me with many impulses for the revision of the theses. For this I would like to express my gratitude to the Council of Europe and the participants of the symposium.

## **Thesis no. 1:**

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### **Today, pluralism is a more appropriate description of the European multi-cultural reality than cultural diversity!**

Today, all over Europe,<sup>4</sup> we are dealing with social structures that are, even if to differing degrees, characterised by cultural diversity. Attempts to seal off national cultures fail sooner or later, and public debates on whether a country is a country of immigration or not are of little help when it comes to meeting the challenges attached to the increasingly multicultural nature of contemporary European societies. Globalisation certainly plays a role. Rather emotional debates on the loss of cultural identity and the classification of ethnic groups in racial terms can still be observed.

I concede that the social manifestations of cultural diversity in everyday life have become increasingly complex and partly inconsistent in our different European societies. Yet, it seems to me that the fact that "culture" refers to a dynamic process, which should be part of public discourse on a concept of justice for the cooperative shaping of social life, has been altogether forgotten. Indeed, this way of seeing culture

still needs to be adequately defined and applied in the public sphere. Neglecting this has consequences: Today, it no longer makes sense to differentiate between majority and minority cultures or to promote intercultural learning as a way of counterbalancing social inequalities through education, in the way that has been attempted by existing (and even well-intentioned) models of integration. This approach has failed because there was no systematic communication and cooperation between policy makers, educationalists and public discourse in relation to the multi-cultural society.

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**European youth work can contribute to the acquisition of a discursive ability and create action-oriented awareness of human rights. These theses intend to provide suggestions on how this can be achieved.**

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The number of so called “model countries” in Europe now helplessly and resignedly facing the sad consequences of one-dimensional and uni-directional integration concepts is quite striking.

Taking inspiration from the proposals of the original first thesis, today we need to find different answers to the following questions:

- ♦ How will we handle the value of pluralism (including the pluralism of religious practices) so present in our day-to-day lives so that a concept of justice is applied that serves as an organising principle for the whole (multicultural) society and at the same time guarantees the rights of the individual?

A second, and even more difficult question, is

- ♦ How can we convey the need for such an approach to pluralism and justice through education and training so that young people learn to deal with (value) conflicts in a manner characterised by critical reasoning instead of exclusion, discrimination and other forms of violence?

Applied value pluralism comprises a multitude of potential conflicts and requires the acceptance of compromises that are often unsatisfactory, also for the individual. To be able to deal with such unsatisfactory outcomes requires mental mobility and the ability to enter into intercultural discourse<sup>5</sup>. Under certain circumstances, European youth work can contribute to the acquisition of the necessary competences for this discursive ability and create action-oriented awareness of human rights. These theses intend to provide some suggestions on how this can be achieved.

## **Thesis no. 2:**

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### **Intercultural learning needs to deal with everyday social and political realities in Europe!**

Objectively, the manifold opportunities for contact between members of different cultures that have characterised recent European history have not led to substantially more mutual understanding or increased social and personal interaction between different peoples. At the same time, it has become obvious that people feel overtaxed by the increasing presence of the multi-cultural reality and fail to interpret and classify this reality adequately. This was already stipulated in the original thesis and if we accept this as true, we need to consider in a more targeted way than in the past how shortfalls in education and training can be overcome.

*Education must provide practice for integrating into society while also immunising against it where it attempts to force people to follow stereotypes of thought and action instead of critical insight<sup>6</sup>.*

Since problems of stereotypical thinking and action are most visible in day-to-day life, it is necessary to look at that level to find intercultural approaches for solving them systematically. Such approaches cannot be found in ostentatious political slogans. Rather they can be found in educational concepts and corresponding educational practice that abandon the primacy of nation-state thinking, or better still of the national-cultural horizon, and which use the concept of “European citizenship” as a fundamental building block. Europe, in this sense, is a framework of values (those defined in the course of the development of European integration in the Council of Europe and the European Union) and a framework of legislation based on legal traditions already existing and structuring the diverse communities that live on the continent. The old call for intercultural learning to take place in everyday life and for intercultural education to take up and use everyday life situations has become more urgent.

In Europe, we observe many more ethnic conflicts within societies and across borders today than 20 years ago<sup>7</sup>:

*The promise of perestroika was followed by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the Soviet empire dissolved, the multinational Yugoslav state collapsed, but from its ruins crawled the dark energies of supposed ethnic identities and ancient territorial claims. The honeymoon of a post-ideological globalisation in universal freedom soon yielded to disillusionment at the sight of conflict*

*types thought long gone. War was waged again in Europe, minorities expelled, and the continent stood helplessly and watched what was happening<sup>8</sup>.*

Hence, Europe can no longer be considered to be in a “post-World War II” situation, in which the creation of understanding and reconciliation between people from the two major ideological blocks of the Cold War were the primary concerns and intercultural learning processes were designed to address them.

Instead, we find ourselves in a kind of “intra-social pre-war” situation, since to this day we have not managed to establish a minimum consensus on those norms and values that rule the relationship between individual freedom and social justice in a multicultural setting (a relationship that generally harbours potential for conflict) and thus enables individuals to act adequately with regard to situation, subject, and object, ie when they act in accordance with their individual personal situation and needs and when superior societal objectives such as social justice can be fully integrated and mediated<sup>9</sup>. This is why we need to reach a changed understanding of intercultural learning: processes of learning that convey and reflect the connection between cognition, moral standards, political awareness, and political action<sup>10</sup>.

### **Thesis no. 3:**

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## **Mobility can better contribute to behavioural change if perceptions of difference in the everyday life environment are continuously challenged and reinterpreted!**

The original thesis contemplated how greater mobility (essentially, travelling abroad) could contribute to changing attitudes and behaviour towards other cultures and events.

Let us remember that in 1990 the first Youth for Europe programme of the then European Community had just come into being. It had partly been developed with this idea in mind and was designed to make cultural proximity possible through encounters in the context of a different culture. As such it was intended to contribute to behavioural change. Some member states regarded mobility first and foremost in the physical sense, but in its objectives and actions this first Youth for Europe programme already assumed that mental mobility had to be developed and fostered for a successful mobility experience, and hence, that something

needed to be learned about oneself and the others to make the most of mobility encounters. These were the first steps taken towards introducing the concept of intercultural learning into a mobility programme.

Nowadays, there is broad consensus that coming into contact with another culture alone neither automatically creates understanding for being different nor prevents ethnocentricity. Likewise, travelling as such does not trigger change. Considering contemporary mass tourism, if this were the case we would expect today to live in a much better world. Instead, socio-scientific findings from the 70's and early 80's on attitudinal change through tourism still apply to many people: visits abroad for tourism usually do not result in long-term attitudinal change. On the contrary, they rather contribute to strengthening negative prejudices since the only references tourists have for interpreting the cultures they visit are those that define difference in their "home" environment. This is why new and repeated learning processes – basically also intercultural ones – are necessary during the entire life-course. And, thence the demand for anchoring intercultural learning in everyday life made in thesis no. 2. If we have made progress here, we will be able to use the potential doubtlessly provided by exercised mobility – travelling – in a more effective way.

#### **Thesis no. 4:**

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### **European youth work has developed way beyond youth exchanges and, therefore, demands other and new competences of its facilitators!**

Following this line of argumentation, the original fourth thesis referred to exchange schemes with young people from different countries: an educationally reasonable alternative to tourist activities as long as certain conditions are guaranteed so that the international encounter has a lasting impact on the young person's day-to-day life. If these conditions are not present, it is extremely likely that the results of such youth encounters will not extend beyond the superficial harmony produced by its social dimension.

Again, at first a reminder of the historical context: European youth encounters, especially multilateral ones and encounters funded by European programmes, were unknown territory at the end of the 1980s – whether considering their educational requirements or their European

policy foundations (c.f. the principle of subsidiarity). As a result, every single sentence of the rules for implementation of the different actions of the Youth for Europe programme was fought over.

The first office established by the Commission for this programme was simply called European Community Youth Exchange Bureau<sup>11</sup>. At that time, youth encounters and corresponding initial and further training for those who facilitated them were regarded as the most important priorities for the development of European youth work<sup>12</sup>.

European youth work today is comprised of far more than youth exchanges, even if these still constitute one important action within the current European Union Youth in Action programme, especially in relation to involving disadvantaged young people, new member states, and young people from the rest of the world in the programme. It still makes sense to give this form of European youth work special attention. But, today we also have to think about other kinds of European youth work.

The preliminary remarks already mentioned some elements characteristic of today's demands on European youth work. A few additional ideas require attention here. The most important change of the past 20 years is the greater value now attached to non-formal and informal education and their recognition. Both have led to European youth work (especially, in the EU) now also being seen in a political context. The White Paper process has contributed to this<sup>13</sup>. The work done by the Council of Europe on the recognition and validation of non-formal education and that resulting from the Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of Youth have been equally influential. As a result, we have at our disposal a common value-oriented, consensus-based catalogue of objectives for non-formal education<sup>14</sup>. Summarising these recent European youth policy developments, demonstrates the extent to which expectations of European youth work extend far beyond selective educational and isolated youth policy action.

European youth work is meant to be efficient, to promote equal opportunities, encourage intercultural dialogue, to enable personal growth and social integration, to initiate and accompany active citizenship, and to improve employability. In short, European youth work is a form of non-formal education that is expected to provide qualifications that are publicly recognised and relevant for the biography of those involved.

If practice is to live up to these expectations, and even if only marginally, it needs to change tremendously and become implemented in a qualified manner under professional conditions. This will have many repercussions on present practices and things taken for granted.

This raises thorny questions:

- ♦ Who will be able to work in this field under which conditions in the future?
- ♦ What is funded for which reason?
- ♦ Who controls process and output quality according to which standards?<sup>15</sup>

Theses no. 9 and 10 will further address these issues.

## **Thesis no. 5:**

### **Intercultural learning should establish the “obligation to be intolerant” of violations of human rights!**

In the original edition, this thesis dealt with the phenomenon of “prejudice” in the context of international youth work. From my current point of view it is still of central importance for our discussion. To refresh our memories, the original is quoted:

*Removing prejudices is one of the things called for most in the context of international youth work. One result of this is that many people hasten to assure that they do not have any prejudices. Where we discover other people have some, we take pleasure in reproaching them. International youth work must set new emphases with regard to the problem of ‘prejudices’. In particular, it must contribute towards moving away from moralising lectures: “There are no people without prejudices and when somebody claims not to have any prejudices, this contention is no doubt the biggest prejudice”<sup>16</sup>. We must learn to accept that we will never know everything and will therefore always have prejudices in the sense of preliminary judgements and that we even need these to a certain extent in order to achieve environmental stabilisation and behavioural confidence. They are, to a certain degree, necessary in ‘psycho-economic’ terms for establishing one’s own identity through dissociating oneself from others<sup>17</sup>. This is not, however, a plea for people to come to terms with their prejudices. When encountering other people, even those from one’s own cultural group, such prejudices are liable to possible change. Whether and to what extent negative prejudice can, for example, be turned into ‘more objective’ judgements also depends on the conditions under which the encounters take place. Added to this is the fact that individuals must acquire particular qualifications if intercultural learning within the context of international youth encounters is to provide substantial opportunities: We must study our*

*own perception habits, stereotyped patterns of interpretation and schematic rules of interaction. We must, above all, become aware of the significance of selective perception: if we have a prejudice regarding a certain type of behaviour, we will, initially, observe only this behaviour again and again.*

*The problem for intercultural education lies in the fact that it is almost impossible to remove such prejudices through purely rational argument, rather they need to be reappraised in new specific situations, i.e. changing negative prejudices through new experience reflected in a different cultural context. Although international youth encounters can also have intercultural learning effects without intended and planned intercultural learning experience, these will tend to be of a chance nature, incomplete and extremely inadequate to the general objectives set out.*

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**Like it or not, we will have to live with an increasing number of initial judgements. The main challenge will be to avoid discriminatory or excluding effects on others and on being different.**

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The set of problems addressed in this thesis has recently become more acute. Looking at the increasing complexity of multicultural societies and growing demands this places on individuals, we have fewer and fewer opportunities to develop well-reasoned and justified judgements on all aspects of social development. Like it or not, we will have to live with an increasing number of initial judgements. The main challenge will be to avoid discriminatory or excluding effects on others and on being different.

I believe that developing intercultural competence alongside personal and social competences – complementary to the key competences in the context of lifelong learning – is the only way to confront the insecurity and fear that results from ambivalence, and thereby to avoid discrimination, racism or any other form of exclusion.

One more aspect is important in this regard: We need a new and changed consensus in society on the notion of tolerance. I find that the term has come to be used less and less proactively. Instead, it rather appears as relating neutrality or indifference. To put it clearly: to be indifferent does not mean to be tolerant, because in being indifferent no position is taken and something is allowed to simply happen even if it contradicts ethical principles and human rights.

To counteract this, we need to set limits to the obligation to be tolerant. In other words, we need to formulate an “obligation to be intolerant”, in



the sense of active intervention if human rights, as the ethical-political foundation of a European concept of justice, are violated.

Thesis 6 further expands on the concept of intercultural learning and the need for its development.

## **Thesis no. 6:**

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### **Intercultural learning is always political!**

In 1990, my introduction to this thesis read as follows:

*Intercultural learning is the collective term for the conscious pedagogical planning and realisation of European youth encounters (the major part of international youth work in quantitative terms) which endeavour to prepare the individual in an appropriate and positive manner for the living and working conditions prevailing in a multicultural society.*

Towards the end, I wrote:

*The content of intercultural learning always includes, irrespective of other subject matter, the behavioural patterns stemming from individual national traditions, whereby young people have to examine the problems arising from the clashing of such different types of behaviour in specific encounter situations and reflect on these with regard to underlying culture-specific habits of thinking and perception.*

Until now, this definition has not encountered any serious content-related opposition<sup>18</sup>. It is no longer, however, able to do justice to the diversity of non-formal learning and educational situations relevant for intercultural learning processes in a (multicultural) socio-political context<sup>19</sup>.

As such, in education aimed at the respect for and the application of human rights (i.e. in a normative context) intercultural learning is always also political learning. Intercultural learning has to contribute to the formation of a crucial minimum consensus on human rights as a concept of justice that protects and ensures individual and social rights and obligations in a multicultural European civil society. Only then can intercultural learning rightly be defined as a necessary prerequisite and as an educational approach to establishing competence for intercultural dialogue<sup>20</sup>. While we see these as inextricably linked, it is nevertheless important to avoid that intercultural dialogue is abused as an alternative or replacement for intercultural learning. Intercultural dialogue without

a concrete reference to the concept of justice outlined above cannot initiate learning processes and does not lead to change in society.

For its very directness and lack of ambiguity, I prefer to use the term intercultural discourse, and discuss it in reference to Habermas' discourse ethics<sup>21</sup>. On the one hand this concept provides for the linking of ethical and moral aspects with cognitive and political ones, a necessary prerequisite for intercultural learning, in my opinion. On the other, it addresses all other educational, social and political facets of intercultural learning<sup>22</sup>.

The following are my preliminary conclusions, therefore, regarding attributes of a yet to be expanded concept for intercultural learning appropriate to today's social conditions:

- ◆ Intercultural learning is the characteristic for a learning multicultural society since intercultural learning processes are also aimed at active democratic citizenship;
- ◆ Intercultural learning creates the conditions for enabling people to tolerate the integrity of all cultural ways of life as a matter of principle within the limits set out in thesis no. 5 and to debate about or dissent from these ways of life with the help of democratically legitimated and politically just procedures;
- ◆ Intercultural learning is a lifelong educational process aimed at the development and stabilisation of all individuals' willingness and ability to acculturate;
- ◆ Intercultural learning is part of the political socialisation process of European civil society<sup>23</sup>.

Before elaborating further, let me make one procedural remark. In the 1997 version theses numbers 7 to 10 dealt with the following aspects: intercultural learning as social learning; relevance of intercultural learning to the practical situation and its reach; the importance of role distance, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity in intercultural learning, and lastly some thoughts about initial and further training of staff engaged in international youth work.

Revising the document provides me with the opportunity to opt for a slightly different structure and clearer emphasis in the remaining four theses. In the following, I firstly adapt the propositions of the 1997 theses

on the three terms of role distance, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity since they are still central to the concept of intercultural learning I am proposing, even if they are often used and not always understood. Thesis no. 8 follows with some remarks on the context of European youth work and European youth policy. Theses numbers 9 and 10 will then conclude by addressing professionalism, quality and competences for, as well as validation and recognition of, non-formal intercultural education and training.

## **Thesis no. 7:**

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### **Role distance, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity – as necessary as ever, if not even more so!**

Our everyday lives mostly consist of situations of interaction. Each interaction – understood as an action-related communicative act – is regulated by role relationships. If nothing unusual happens, we do not have to question our roles: they have been internalised and we act accordingly. The more complex role adoption is, as a result of unconscious processes of socialisation, the more secure we feel (ego strength) and the more we believe that we are behaving in a manner appropriate to the respective interactive situation.

We do not reflect on the fact that this process of role adoption is not completed once and for all at a specific moment in time. We do not think about the fact that roles always also exist in varying degrees of consistency and concreteness and are subject to change as a result of intervening events and situations.

Without this basic possibility for change in role adoption (social ego identity) there would hardly be any chance for intercultural learning to succeed, as our interactions increasingly take place in a multicultural environment where the usual role behaviour is less and less successful in achieving the intended effect. The need for minor and major role changes, in the sense of role taking and role making, is thus increasing. In order to learn new roles and to be able to accept others, role distance is necessary. This refers to the individual ability to see and put into perspective one's own attitudes, perception habits and patterns of thought against the background of the norms of one's own culture. This ability is so important because, without this relativisation, stimuli from a different culture will not be accepted as positive learning stimuli. Instead,

they will rather result in a strengthening of existing prejudice structures and a fixation on existing role patterns. Role distance is, therefore, an essential prerequisite for intercultural learning.

New understanding of an old or as yet unfamiliar role presupposes the ability to place oneself in new situations. Without empathy, perception remains confined to one's own respective cultural context and, as such, general everyday practice is also not reflected upon. Empathy is, thus, an important condition for developing the ability to interact and competence to act – both important characteristics of the ability to take on intercultural discourse as described below.

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**Tolerance of ambiguity describes the degree to which a person can endure not being able to implement his or her own ideas and expectations. Intercultural learning can help us to avoid using competing stereotypes as a means of maintaining and asserting our own position.**

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Intercultural discourse is aimed at establishing extensive agreement between the content and relationship aspect of communication and agreement between the interacting partners at the relationship level. Without empathy, without putting oneself in someone else's place and situation, this cannot succeed. A situation new to all those involved requires a common interpretation of what is perceived to be the reality of that situation, in order to develop new competence for action. Looking at the complexity of everyday situations where cultures overlap, empathy also implies the anticipated review of what can be communicated or conveyed to others as experience through action.

This addresses tolerance of ambiguity: the ability to tolerate different interests, expectations and needs (within the limits described in thesis no. 5) and to make allowances for them in situations of interaction. Apart from that, tolerance of ambiguity describes the degree to which a person can endure not being able to implement his or her own ideas and expectations. Intercultural learning can help us to avoid using competing stereotypes as a means of maintaining and asserting our own position. Unfortunately, we still all too often witness this kind of behaviour at the political level.

In the context of European youth work, this behaviour should have largely been outgrown because tolerance of ambiguity, usually in combination with role distance and empathy, is understood as a crucial basic qualification of social action in a European civil society<sup>24</sup>.

## **Thesis no. 8:**

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### **European youth work has to be professionalised within a wider European youth policy development strategy!**

Today, European youth work is the most important field of non-formal education in Europe, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Furthermore, it is the motor of increasing awareness of European citizenship (at least in the EU political context) and for reflection on the way in which an operational, democratic, European civil society can be developed and the characteristics it should have. The field of European youth work today is basically defined by the programmes, actions and funding schemes of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Through the Youth in Action programme and the White Paper “A New Impetus for European Youth” there is increased acceptance of the idea that European youth work cannot be seen as isolated educational activities but needs to be integrated into a coordinated European concept of youth policy<sup>25</sup>.

Instruments such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)<sup>26</sup> or the Structured Dialogue are first steps in the direction of the development of such a concept, and far be it from my intention to belittle them. They have provided important impetus for youth policy development at the level of the individual member states and have led to better quality information on the European level. However, it cannot be denied that with the beginning of the Lisbon Process (2000) and its ambitious goal to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world until 2010, youth policy has been placed under the primacy of employment and social integration objectives.

While, fundamentally, this is not wrong, it cannot be considered the full and exhaustive extent of the role of European youth work within a European youth policy strategy. Considering the great needs of young people today, especially disadvantaged young people, for orientation and support in their transitions to adult life and that the number of young people needing such support is not declining, this would not be adequate.

In my opinion, the systematic use of all kinds of non-formal learning and educational situations provided for by European programmes for such purposes and more would be within the scope of action of European youth work. However, such an extended mandate needs to be politically desired (funding) and possible in administrative terms (access

and procedures). Clearly, leaving the field of European youth work to a few powerful organisations is not sufficient.

Hence, European youth work needs to reposition itself, in relation to the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission and with regard to the key competences for lifelong learning, which are quite compatible with the general objectives of intercultural political (civic) education (interkulturelle politische Bildung).

As such, and in my opinion, European youth work, needs to develop a new self image based on extensive analysis, firstly of the social challenges it faces in relation to the emergence of European civil society (in other words, a changed understanding of intercultural learning as a process of political learning with socio-political vision, and of all the pedagogical-methodological implications this has for its organisation), and secondly of the standards demanded of European youth work by the key features of contemporary youth, education, and labour market policies at European level, some of which I already mentioned in the preliminary remarks. European youth work still demonstrates some clear deficits in this regard and consequently there is a need for discussion and action. Professionalism and competence, quality, validation and recognition of non-formal learning are all key to this debate. The remaining two theses will provide further detail<sup>27</sup>.

### **Thesis no. 9:**

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## **European youth work needs professionalisation and should not be afraid of it!**

At the very least, European programmes express recognition of the importance that non-formal and informal education have for young people growing up. Experiences, insights, knowledge, abilities and skills obtained and acquired are recognised as being of complementary value to what can be acquired in formal education. European youth work needs to develop a clear professional profile in order to be able to demonstrate, in a manner relevant to practice, the specific positive potential of non-formal education, its verifiable results and its effectiveness, in comparison to formal education.

Apart from adequate financial resources and organisational conditions, European youth work needs qualified staff above all. The professional demands on individuals who take on responsibility in the context of European youth work will continue to increase in a dual perspective.

On the one hand, these are expected to have the qualifications and competences necessary to achieve the objectives of the programme concerned and to ensure that quality educational work is delivered. Someone who only occasionally and “in passing” facilitates European youth encounters or who once participated in a training course cannot acquire these qualifications and competences. On the other hand, in the future, commonly accepted standards will have to be applied to the characterisation of the profession of European youth work in order to ensure that those engaging in this profession can access adequately recognised, protected and remunerated employment. Although European youth work today is in fact already much more of a profession than reflected in youth policy, it is still to a considerable degree defined by the fact that most of its staff are volunteers.

With a view to the political demands and the expectations of those concerned I, therefore, see the need to call for decidedly more professionalisation than has been achieved until now.

This does not mean that the contribution or commitment of voluntary youth workers at the European level should be underestimated or neglected. Rather, this call for more professionalisation aims at the integration of so-far unrecognised professional European youth workers into a clearly defined professional environment alongside their volunteer colleagues, in line with a concept of quality that is accepted by all stakeholders. The following are examples of characteristics of such a professional environment, not all of which are currently in place for those doing European youth work: involvement in an organisation or affiliation with a structure; a certain permanence and continuity; financial and social coverage; regular further training and cooperative discourse. For the sake of completeness, it should also be mentioned that professional conditions are also required for effective planning, organisation, implementation, and administration of educational processes.

Of course, the call for greater professionalisation does not only refer to the scope of work as such, but first and foremost, to the professional profile of those who function in a pedagogical capacity in European youth work. In my opinion, (specialised) academic training beneficial to their type of work and specific relevant face-to-face practice in the field are fundamental to the adequate qualification of staff given such responsibilities. Then, those competences (knowledge, capabilities and skills) which are required for conducting youth work and non-formal educational activities with an intercultural focus have to be acquired by all those involved as educators.

Such a competence profile accepted throughout Europe (at least as regards a common set of standards) is still in its infancy and faces a lot of resistance, because so far there is hardly any public discourse on what exactly European youth work can and should contribute to the development of the European civil society. Instead, the community of practice concerned has been tinkering with specific profiles tailored to a concrete programme or action. While this approach is better than nothing, it remains absolutely insufficient with regard to what needs to be done. The public discussion at European level that has been initiated on quality in non-formal education with a view to training in the context of European youth work is, thus, an important step in the right direction, all the more since it is supported by the European Commission and the Council of Europe through the SALTO network and the Partnership on Youth<sup>28</sup>.

### **Thesis no. 10:**

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## **European youth work requires a professional profile and specialised professional training like all other educational professions!**

Quality has developed to become a key term in youth work, national and international, but above all in European youth work funded by programmes and actions of the European Union and Council of Europe. Pressure is increasing on the institutions and organisations that conduct non-formal education to provide evidence that they are qualified for this kind of work. In the absence of such evidence, it will become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for them to access public funding.

Fundamentally, there is nothing wrong with this (see also thesis no. 9): if professional standards cannot be demanded, quality and sustainability can hardly be requested of European youth work.

A new dimension has, however, been introduced through demand for recognition and validation (certification) of the quality and results of non-formal education. The European Union's Youth in Action programme has taken the first step with the introduction of the Youthpass (obligatory for single actions) and the Council of Europe has also responded to this demand by developing a self-assessment tool (voluntary) for youth leaders and workers (using a portfolio approach).

The foreseeable consequence of the above is that European youth work will need to become more formalised as the required public recognition of experiences and knowledge obtained in the non-formal learn-



ing context can only be afforded if these learning results can be assessed and withstand comparison with those acquired within the formal educational system. This validation and recognition is most notably demanded by those working in the interests of disadvantaged young people. Non-formal education is seen as an approach to compensating for disadvantages such young people experience in the formal educational system and as an alternative route for them to access recognised qualifications.

This leads us to the following challenge in the form of two inter-linked questions: How can the special character of non-formal and informal learning be preserved while meeting the expectation that learning results will be externally validated so that participants gain a form of qualification valued at the same level as those certificates and confirmations issued by the formal education and training system? Is this balancing act possible?

If the didactic principles and methodological procedures of non-formal education are to remain unshaken – which I explicitly endorse – this challenge can only be met through the process of professionalisation called for above: European youth work is work – and as for any other job a specific job profile is needed. Pedagogical work with young people is a particularly sensitive field with far reaching implications for their socialisation. Therefore, wherever education, initial and further training are concerned, professional training for those conducting such work is a fundamental condition for their employment. This is already the case for kindergartens, schools, universities and vocational training institutions. Why is it not the case for European youth work?

Let us start to attempt to reach some common level of understanding concerning some competences, which if achieved, will characterise the quality of an activity (and of those who run it and graduate from it). Let us at the same time, and in relation to those competencies, consider the intercultural and political context of the emerging European civil society. And, let us have the courage to also include certain personal characteristics in the competence profile because European youth work is also work with values, with normative principles, it means working with perceptions and attitudes and requires a developed ability to make moral judgements. Together with the other elements mentioned for a competence profile, it will be possible to achieve professional standards.

Then, quality can be demanded and demonstrated. Then, validation and recognition of non-formal education will have their own value at the same level as that for formal education. For that purpose, though,

time and again we have to look for answers to some vital and central questions:

*“What are the radical changes we are facing today? Do we still love our lives? Are we still able to have a good idea of what is going on? What should we work on? What are the important issues? What attitude, what ethics, what knowledge do we need?”*<sup>29</sup>

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Translation from German: Gudrun Kütke  
Editor of this English version: Yael Ohana

## Notes

- 1 Oberste-Lehn, H., Wende, W., editors, *Handbuch Internationale Jugendarbeit. Interkulturelles Lernen*. Düsseldorf: 1990.
- 2 A pdf of the 1997 version is available for download in English, French and German at: [www.ikab.de](http://www.ikab.de)
- 3 Also see: Otten, Hendrik, *Jugendarbeit in Europa. Anregungen zur Qualifizierung pädagogisch Verantwortlicher und zur Professionalisierung pädagogischen Handelns im interkulturellen Kontext vor dem Hintergrund der Erfahrungen mit JUGEND und in der Perspektive von JUGEND IN AKTION*. Documents N° 9. Jugend in Aktion. Deutsche Agentur JUGEND. Bonn: 2006. [www.jugendfuereuropa.de](http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de)
- 4 Europe is to be understood geopolitically in the context of the EU and Council of Europe.
- 5 See thesis 6 for more explanation.
- 6 Alexander Mitscherlich, Die dialektische Funktion, die Erziehung erfüllen sollte. In: H. Haase, ed., *Alexander Mitscherlich, Gesammelte Schriften. Volume III: Sozialpsychologie I*. P.33 Frankfurt: 1983.
- 7 In this context this publication is worth reading: *Lettre internationale*, N° 81: *So leben wir jetzt. Künstler, Dichter, Denker zur Lage der Welt*. Berlin: 2008.
- 8 Frank Berberich, *Gruss an die Leser*. In: Remark 7, page 13
- 9 In this context, a far-reaching deficit should be mentioned: The fact that discussions on intercultural learning in the past have not looked systematically and sufficiently enough at Islam as a culturally different world-view which nevertheless offers points of contact although it is meanwhile shaping and partly also thoroughly changing situations of everyday life in almost all European countries. The primarily isolated examination of individual aspects or the focussing on fundamentalist activities have contributed to reducing Islam to an unjust system that deserves political retribution and letting the great cultural achievements Islam has given to humanity sink into oblivion instead of embracing the opportunity to emphasise them as linking elements for common agreements on a concept of justice (on that topic see also: Hendrik Otten, *Multikulturelle Gesellschaften und interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung – Plädoyer für einen Perspektivenwechsel*. In: Hendrik Otten, Peter Lauritzen, eds., *Jugendarbeit und Jugendpolitik in Europa*. p. 18ff. Wiesbaden: 2004)
- 10 On that topic see also: Hendrik Otten, *Menschenrechte. Grundwerte und Menschenrechte als normativer Rahmen politischer Bildung*. (Human Rights: Fundamental Values and Human Rights as Normative Structures for Political Education) in Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. (Ed.), *Grundlagen unserer Demokratie* (Fundamental Aspects of our Democracy), Bonn: 1988.
- 11 Starting in 1987, the author of these theses worked for approximately 10 years

- in the Brussels governing bodies of this bureau and its successor institutions, mainly being responsible for the educational programme quality including education, training, and evaluation issues.
- 12 Though only by those who thought an orientation towards Europe to be important and necessary for youth work, something that did not go without saying in educational, political or circles of youth associations.
  - 13 White paper by the European Commission: *A new impetus for European youth*. 2001.
  - 14 Keywords for this are for instance: democratic active citizenship / participation; anti-racist thinking and acting; human rights orientation in everyday life
  - 15 For more details and up-to-date information (September 2008) see the following study: Helmut Fennes and Hendrik Otten, *Quality in non-formal education and training in the field of European youth work*. An English version can be downloaded from: <http://www.salto-youth.net/trainercompetencestudy/> - a German version can be downloaded as documents N° 10 from: <http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de>
  - 16 John Dewey, quoted from R. Bergler, Vorurteile und Stereotypen. In: A. Heigel-Evers, ed., *Sozialpsychologie. Volume I: Die Erforschung der zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen*. P. 238. Weinheim / Basel: 1984.
  - 17 Developed in: G. W. Allport, *The nature of prejudice*. New York: 1954.
  - 18 Teresa Cunha and Rui Gomes wrote an article worth reading on the development of the term “intercultural learning”, titled: Against the waste of experiences in intercultural learning. In: *Coyote* N° 13. Strasbourg: 2008.
  - 19 The 1990/1997 version of the theses explicitly focused on European youth encounters, hence the respective wording, but I myself have always understood the term in a broader sense and, in retrospect, I feel I have been right in doing so. Hendrik Otten, *Intentionen politischer Pädagogik im interkulturellen Bereich (1985)* Interkulturelles Lernen als politische Bildung in der europäischen Zivilgesellschaft (2003). In: G.J. Friesenhahn, A. Thimmel, eds., *Schlüsseltexzte. Engagement und Kompetenz in der internationalen Jugendarbeit*. P. 158ff. Schwalbach/Ts: 2005.
  - 20 See remark 18.
  - 21 Jürgen Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen (The Inclusion of the Other)*. Studien zur politischen Theorie. 5. Auflage. Frankfurt: 2003.
  - 22 For more details see: Hendrik Otten in remark 9, p. 23 ff.
  - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
  - 24 I first presented this correlation in detail in: Hendrik Otten, *Zur politischen Didaktik interkulturellen Lernens*. Opladen: 1985. The chapter Kommunikative Didaktik als methodisches Prinzip (p. 40 ff) in particular, explains the interplay of role distance, empathy and ambiguity tolerance with a view to the development of personal and social ego identity, the ability for intercultural interaction and competence to act. From today’s point of view I still think this publication is appropriate regarding general definitions of objectives for intercultural learning, the political legitimacy thereof, and epistemological foundations; the didactic implementation would of course be different today and follow the described demands of European youth work and a stronger focus on the political dimension.
  - 25 Also see remark 3.
  - 26 The structured dialogue is one instrument of the OMC; also see remark 13.
  - 27 I will closely refer to my own works in references 3 and 9 and to: Hendrik Otten, *Europäische Jugendarbeit unter Qualifizierungsdruck – Plädoyer für mehr Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit*. In: IJAB – Fachstelle für Internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. ed., *Qualität zeigt Wirkung – Entwicklung und Perspektiven. Forum Jugendarbeit International*. Bonn: 2007.
  - 28 See remark 15. In the first section and in two annexes the study explains about quality standards in great detail, in the second section about necessary elements of competence for such a profile.
  - 29 Frank Berberich in remark 7.

# **‘Plastic, Political and Contingent’: Culture and Intercultural Learning in Directorate of Youth and Sport Activities\***

*Gavan Titley*

## **Introduction**

**I**t is increasingly argued that many of our contemporary societies are characterised by relations of mobility and immobility; money moves freely while people struggle for clandestine channels, goods flow across ‘open’ markets while labour is increasingly circumscribed and trammelled, images and information of others and other places circulate instantaneously while recidivist prejudice informs geo-political manoeuvres. This tension is felt in time as well as space; Jean-Francois Richard, in his keynote speech at the Europe, Youth and Globalisation Event (Strasbourg, France, 5-9 May 2004), drew attention to the widening gap between dog years – the intensified pace of techno-economic change – and institutional time, the relatively decreasing speed at which large structures can assimilate visions and analyses of change and translate them into policy-based practice<sup>1</sup>. This sense of increasing disjuncture is also felt at the level of research; as Arjun Appadurai notes in a discussion of research in an era of globalisation, there is an “...inherent temporal lag between processes...and our efforts to contain them conceptually”<sup>2</sup>.

If there is an inherent lag between processes and their conceptual mapping, it should come as no surprise if a significant gap appears between the core assumptions and approaches of educational work, and the new conceptual mapping emerging from a constant struggle with the complexities of social and cultural life. The aim of this discussion document is to suggest that dominant approaches to intercultural learning have become irredeemably weakened; they lag behind in terms of both conceptual and political adequacy and the ways in which young people are increasingly articulating their experiences in Directorate of Youth and Sport activities. However, dominant approaches to intercultural learning are not just victims of the tension between dog years and institutional time; they are also implicated in consolidating counter-productive and

reductionist perspectives, and in some cases, of compounding the very politics they explicitly aim to oppose.

This discussion document contends that ‘culture talk’ in European youth work has become debilitating, that culture as it is often discussed obscures more than it clarifies, and that trusted approaches to intercultural learning promote simplistic analyses and solutions for change that are at odds with the fine-grained knowledge many youth workers have of their context. It argues that intercultural learning has become a self-fulfilling prophecy in youth work with little purchase in realities beyond the international training scene. This is not to deny the value of many approaches or the obvious salience of thinking about and analysing cultural processes. Discussing the world and people’s experiences through terms and concepts they value, and facilitating educational approaches informed by years of expertise in cultural education, remain important to European youth work. This argument contends that intercultural learning is weakened by its own overt success, and that this over-extension and inflation is responsible for the lag between what many are experiencing and the ways in which intercultural education offers frameworks and concepts for engaging around that experience with others in an educational process.

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**Culture as it is often discussed obscures more than it clarifies.**

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This document takes as its starting point the Long Term Training Course on Intercultural Learning 2003-4, and was initially conceived as an alternative form of course documentation. One thing that has become apparent to many active in Directorate of Youth and Sport activities is that while there is a lag between experience, conceptualisation and structured educational response, the lag is shortest between the discussions of experience in courses and the ways in which training situations react and innovate to the field of ideas and discussions that emanate from a group. In other words, it is a conviction that underlies this analysis that many courses and seminars are developing responses to the holes that appear during the application of well-known methodologies and approaches, but that this spontaneous innovation is not captured and translated institutionally into wider discussions and resources. Therefore this document sets out to relate issues and discussions that were prevalent during this very particular Long Term Training Course to wider considerations of the practice and importance of intercultural learning, and to move from this dialogue to a set of questions and suggestions for wider conversation between the research and policy arms of the institution, training professionals, and youth organisations.

As a discussion document this text aims to be precisely that; it is not based on any form of planned or structured research, however it draws deeply from the mass of evaluation and impressions collected by the team during one year of intense analysis and planning. It is written with the assumption that these debates will look very different from the vantage point of different practitioners, training experiences and priorities, contexts and programmes, but that nevertheless these debates need to take place within something called the European training community. It also draws on accumulative discussions with many practitioners over time that suggest that a fundamental reconsideration of intercultural learning would be of benefit<sup>3</sup>. We have become accustomed to the idea of triangulation between policy, research and training, while in practice finding that this is a difficult practice both structurally and discursively. This discussion document sets out to partially ‘square the triangle’ by relating a particular training experience to questions raised by recent research sanctioned by the Directorate of Youth and Sport most notably the work collected in *Resituating Culture* (2004) – and by attempting to translate some of this reflection into questions that policy-making can engage with.

In the author’s experience of the Directorate of Youth and Sport educational offer during the last ten years, the value of its achievements and successes in consolidating and innovating intercultural education are not in doubt. Intercultural learning has become a key work area in European youth training during the last fifteen years, and the work of the Directorate of Youth and Sport has been highly influential in this development.

Various publications and numerous training courses have supported youth leaders and workers in developing awareness of cultural issues and the dynamics of cultural identities, and in developing competences for planning and implementing youth activities with an intercultural dimension. Nevertheless, there must come a moment where the widespread relevance of the corpus of approaches and methodologies which have accrued are questioned in relation to a complex youth sociology and what people have begun to call the ‘diverse modernities of the Council of Europe’<sup>4</sup>

This document argues that approaches which have been consolidated and widely reproduced during this period of growth and influence are no longer adequate to the realities in which young people live and practice youth work. A central emphasis on culture as a focus of education and potential change runs the risk of essentialising and freezing

identities and hegemonising ideas of culture that are limited and overly prescriptive. Similarly, dominant approaches to intercultural learning may ignore the intersection of cultural identities with ethnicity, gender, class and individuated factors, and most seriously, may appear naïve in relation to the politicisation of culture in European political debates. Indeed, there is growing criticism that focusing on intercultural learning contributes to the dilution of the political nature of youth work, partially undoing the successes of earlier campaigns and programmes, and particularly in a context where anti-racism needs clear and unambiguous support.

This discussion proceeds by offering a broad-ranging discussion of sociological and cultural theory in relation to the wider practice of intercultural learning in European youth training. In doing so, it is worth recalling a point made by this author in a discussion of the relationship between youth researchers and youth workers in *Coyote*: “[...] research (and theory) are not corrective, or higher form(s) of knowledge... (to present it as such) would be to replicate the persistent and annoying division in training of the theoretical and the concrete, an artificial division that ignores the conditions by which social research is produced, and the ways in which ‘theories’ lurk, perhaps subsumed and undeclared, within the principles and methods of practice”<sup>5</sup>

The contention of this chapter is that many approaches to intercultural learning are weakened precisely by subsuming their theoretical status and intellectual history, and that much of the assumed theory that informs intercultural approaches is simply inadequate and counter-productive. This is not to suggest a constant search for ‘better’ theory, but rather to make transparent the inclusions and exclusions at work in the process of methodological selection, to encourage critical approaches to the relevance of methodologies and theories in diverse contexts, and to develop training approaches that present a discursive overview and reflection on how certain forms of education invite us to frame and respond to the world.

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## **INTERCULTURAL LEARNING: A CHANGING EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE?**

Intercultural learning is to European youth work what ‘world peace’ is to the Miss World Competition; everybody is in favour of it and says nice things about it. Unlike world peace, it seems like everybody practices it

too; in a topic search on the SALTO<sup>6</sup> Trainers online for youth database, a search reveals that 152 of 165 registered trainers describe themselves as offering ‘intercultural learning’. Of course, intercultural learning is popular and widely practised for good reasons. It is now common to see interculturalism widely incorporated as an educational philosophy and approach, guiding choices that are made in the planning and implementation of activities. As a latent, guiding pedagogical approach, high quality intercultural education invites us to develop as reflexive agents in our interaction with people of

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**While the idea of culture is almost universally received, it does not follow from this that education about culture is universally transferable, and indeed, the transferability of methods and theoretical frameworks is becoming increasingly limited.**

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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.

That said, the label *intercultural learning* encompasses everything people decide to include in it. Despite the confident brand of knowledge apparently signified by the prevalent acronym ‘ICL’, the range of approaches denoted by ‘intercultural learning’ constitutes a wide spectrum, including often deeply contradictory approaches to this form of youth work. These different practices involve theories of culture drawn from different disciplines and research traditions, theories that are not easily abstracted from their conceptual and contextual histories. These theories are inherently part of methodologies drawn and adapted from highly diverse applications of intercultural education; from language learning to volunteer acclimatisation to military conditioning and everything in between. To return to the straw pole of SALTO solutions, it is probably safe to assume that 152 people are not doing exactly or sometimes even remotely the same thing when they offer ‘intercultural learning’.

This diversity and contradiction is obviously not inherently problematic. What it does, however, is place a responsibility on practitioners to make the nature of their intercultural educational practice transparent, and suggests the need for trainees and users to evaluate the relevance of different approaches and theories to the context in which they engage



in youth work. While the idea of culture is almost universally received, it does not follow from this that education about culture is universally transferable, and indeed, the transferability of methods and theoretical frameworks is becoming increasingly limited. Similarly, the ubiquity of a concept does not guarantee its relevance. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the broad sweep of approaches fluidly categorised as ‘inter-cultural learning’ is another key site of the critical skills and approaches discussed by Hendrik Otten in a recent discussion paper on training attitudes, skills and competences<sup>7</sup>. As Otten contends:

*[...] it can be said that in view of the increasing complexity of European societies, the requirements for education and training are growing, and the knowledge and skill needs demanded of those who are responsible for education and training are accordingly complex. (2002: 11)*

Put in this way, Otten proposes an abstract yet clear relationship between the complexity of societies, and the concomitant complexity of training skills. He highlights two inter-related aspects of trainer competence: *personal aspects*, including cognitive-intellectual, moralethical, emotional; and action-oriented dimensions and *activity-related aspects*, including the didactic structure of training, methodologies, specific contents, and its political aims and objectives. Otten summarises the implications of this for training and trainers thus:

*[...] Training (should be) more subject, object and situation-adequate – a kind of paradigm shift, in order to get an intellectual hold on a changed youth sociology setting and the complex requirements of training and education as elements of life-long learning... Trainers in this European level high quality training are also knowledge managers – they have to know many things; mainly however in view of the complexity of European societies [...] they have to be knowledge brokers. (p.12-13)*

Approaching intercultural learning in this light involves a series of adaptive challenges; the complexity of a broad canon of differentiated approaches must be adjudicated in relation to meaningful knowledge of the context of training. According to the *Intercultural Learning T-Kit* this is no less than the mission of this type of education; it strives for empowerment in the face of complex realities<sup>8</sup>. Intercultural learning, then, should be what Otten terms subject, object and situation adequate. These indicators are made all the more complex by the realisation, as Ulf

Hannerz puts it, that “culture is everywhere”<sup>9</sup>; not only in the sense that everybody is enculturated, but that culture in contemporary societies is a site of controversy and struggle over identity, belonging, legitimacy and entitlement. Intercultural education, therefore, cannot be simplistically seen as education about culture, cultural process and enculturation, but instead has to be regarded as a fluid area of approaches that activate different ideas of culture and its significances based on an intimate knowledge of the context in which education takes place.

It is the contention of this discussion that ideas of culture that inform a significant proportion of common intercultural approaches are inadequate according to the minimal criteria Otten propounds. They are analytically inadequate, depending on static and homogenising ideas of culture as a binding marker of identity in social contexts where socio-cultural experience and the relations between preferred and ascribed identities have become increasingly complex. Compounding this is their political inadequacy, as by normalising culture as the prime marker of human identity and belonging dominant intercultural approaches compound the logic of cultural nationalism and culturalised racism, and relegate the importance of gender, class, multiple senses of belonging and identity, sexuality, age and many other individuated aspects of identity and experience.

In my experience, working through the prism of culture rarely recognises the ways in which our cultural environments are becoming more diffuse, nor is there much awareness of how dominant interpretations of culture are becoming re-romanticised and heavily politicised. These terminal inadequacies are worsened by the ways in which activities, theories and methodologies that deal with ‘culture’ are often seen as interchangeable and widely applicable, instead of as products of particular discourses and histories of development and usage. This results in a potentially ironic situation; as more people turn to training for ways of reflecting on and acting in complex realities, there is a wider potential distribution of methods and approaches fixated on models and ideas incommensurable with the realities faced by young people and youth organisations across Europe.

This chapter develops this critique by examining reasons for the evolution of culture as an overwhelmingly powerful concept, and some of the more contemporary arguments for transcending it. It continues by applying the implications of this analysis to dominant practices of intercultural learning, and concludes by condensing these discussions into key areas of weakness in intercultural education.

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## THE NECESSARY INFLATION AND DEFLATION OF CULTURE

Before elaborating on the charge sheet hinted at in the introduction, it is important to note that culture was not plucked from thin air and randomly elected to the office of chief global concept. Its complex history of usage, and its current ubiquity, are products of what is and has been at stake in arguing for the salience of culture and different cultures. From its first recorded usage in the English language circa 1420 culture has been a subject of constant interest and critique, not to mention political and social struggle. It is inherent in the nature of this struggle for conceptual and often political supremacy that the contention that culture is best approached as a site of contesting discourses is often ignored<sup>10</sup>. As Chris Barker summarises: “The concept of culture does not represent a fixed entity in an independent object world but is best thought of as a mobile signifier that denotes different ways of talking about human activity with divergent uses and purposes...the concept of culture is plastic, political and contingent<sup>11</sup>. In current dominant intercultural learning approaches, there are plenty of reasons to suggest that the concept of culture is understood as being wooden, apolitical and universally fixed.

Prior to presenting key developments in the inflation of culture, it may be necessary to anticipate some objections. This suspicion of the uses of culture in youth work is not provoked by a desire for theoretical sophistication in youth work, nor is it to suggest that discussing culture is not a central aspect of youth work with a European dimension. All too often, reflective discussions of the concepts promoted and normalised by youth work are met with self-serving and patronising objections about preserving the openness of non-formal education. Contrary to this, my critique is that non-formal education has become too closed, and paradoxically, this has occurred by cherry-picking intercultural approaches that have been developed in radically different contexts and practices. *Culture* is a particularly alluring and powerful framework; like the nation and nationality – which culture is now often used as a code for – it gifts a relationship of particularity and universalism. In other words, everybody is automatically different together.

When handled in particular ways, the universalising aspect of culture can easily be stretched to encompass and explain far more than is useful or beneficial. As Wolfgang Welsch has observed, culture is simultaneously a descriptive and prescriptive notion, and political responsibility

comes with propagandising one notion over another<sup>12</sup>. In other words, our cultural realities are always intimately related to our conceptual understandings of culture, and this is a realisation that much intercultural learning practice has yet to take seriously. We will return to this line of argument in the following sections.

The general reasons for what I am now characterising as over-burdening and inadequacy are many and involved, and this discussion can do no more than hint at several trajectories that have elevated culture to the status of a globally unifying concept. For the sake of coherence and organisation these trajectories are organised as bullet points below, however this should not suggest that these represent discrete and separate areas. Most if not all of the points outlined are highly interdependent.

**(A)**

Perhaps the most significant discussion of culture – at least for the purposes of intercultural learning – has been the post-war shift towards culture as an antidote to the virulent hierarchies of ‘race’. As Alana Lentin has detailed<sup>13</sup>, UNESCO played a key role in centring culture by aiming to undermine racism’s supposed reliance on the pseudo-science of race while providing an alternative explanation for human difference and diversity. To quote:

*The main proposal made by UNESCO, and most forcefully by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his short book *Race and History* (1961), was that human groups could be divided according to cultures which were relative to each other. The idea that each culture contributed ‘in its own way’ to humanity as a whole sought to counter the widely accepted belief that a hierarchy of ‘race’ divided Europeans and non-Europeans. Lévi-Strauss celebrated the diversity of humanity, demonstrated by what he called, the ‘distinctive contributions’ of each cultural group. He stressed his belief that different levels of progress between such groups could not be attributed to any innate differences. Rather, progress comes about as a result of interaction between groups. The historical chance that led to the onset of modernity taking place in the West meant that the other cultures that rubbed shoulders with it experienced more rapid progress. Those that remained isolated did not. The UNESCO Tradition in anti-racism, to which Lévi-Strauss’s work was central, was translated into a specific approach to opposing racism based on the belief that racism could be overcome by recognising that the real problem was one of ethnocentrism; by promoting the benefits of cultural diversity as enriching society and by encouraging greater knowledge of other cultures among western societies.*

The final sentences detail assumptions in intercultural learning – and its relationship to antiracism – that are still widely recognisable. This passage also notes the centrality of cultural relativism, a problematic that will be discussed in subsequent sections.

**(B)**

A slightly later development has been the necessity of asserting cultural difference and particularity in relation to the universalising theories of modernisation that guided ‘development’ from the 1950s through to at least the 1970s (and which have perhaps made an unwelcome if latent reappearance during the ‘war on terror’). Primarily North American modernisation theorists – who, unlike the vast majority of theorists, had the willing ear of government – constructed the world as a series of nodes on a linear progress towards developed modernity, and primarily imagined non-Western and colonial/post-colonial contexts as ‘traditional societies’ in need of accelerated modernisation. As Vincent Tucker expresses it; “Modernization theorists were concerned with understanding the culture of other societies so as to manipulate them and adapt them to the exigencies of development. . . other cultural formations were viewed primarily as forms of resistance to modernisation which had to be overcome”<sup>14</sup>. Anti-imperialist movements and critics have, as a result, both critiqued the cultural assumptions that informed ideas of progress and development, and asserted the resilience and alternative world-views of cultures that had been slated for ‘inevitable modernisation’.

**(C)**

Related to the last point above has been the critique offered by postmodern philosophers of what they term grand-narratives; meta-ideas for the organisation of stories of human life, including Christianity, Marxism, Enlightenment Humanism, nationalism, and so forth. Postmodernism, although it is something of a generalisation, has been both lauded and criticised for sanctioning widespread cultural relativism through its suspicion of universalism and trans-historical claims to validity and truth. In the same vein, postmodern approaches refused to accept the idea of Culture as ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’ and instead approached culture as the practice of everyday life, where cultural products – such as television shows and popular music – were discussed for their subjective and affective significance, rather than being dismissed for their supposedly objective aesthetic and moral inadequacy. In short, postmodernism sanctioned pluralism and relativism on all cultural registers.

**(D)**

Sociology and social analysis have, over roughly the last 25 years, been engaged in what has been termed a ‘cultural turn’, influenced not only by postmodernism but also by cultural linguistics and cultural studies. Again, while this is something of a generalisation, it is generally taken to mean a dawning focus on subjective, interpretative/hermeneutic and affective aspects of social life that could not be captured in theories of society that favoured notions of instrumental rationality, or that conceptualised the individual in society within shifting relations of structure and agency. Instead, cultural analysis examines the ways in which people imagine, negotiate and construct the world they exist within.

**(E)**

Perhaps most importantly, the development of multicultural philosophies and policies in many countries has centred culture as the prime marker of difference and belonging. As Colm O’Cinneide argues in his contribution to *Resituating Culture*, multiculturalism is often regarded as a response to the problems posed by liberal and republican ideas of the individual citizen inhabiting a neutral and difference-blind state<sup>15</sup>. What such universalist notions of the citizen ignored (and continue to ignore) is that equality may be formal, but it does not follow that it will be in any way substantive without reference to the impediments created by social differentiation and without regard to the ways in which barriers to access and participation must be removed. Various theories and practices of multicultural citizenship<sup>16</sup> have advocated a recognition of difference and its consequences, and agitated for countervailing representation in politics and the public sphere. These debates have been closely associated with the position and rights of ‘national minorities’, and often problematically extended to migrant ethnic groups. The serious problems with hegemonic multiculturalism are discussed below.

**(F)**

Recently, widespread debates and anxieties about the cultural impact of globalisation have provoked anxiety about the nature of cultural experience and the erosion of cultural autonomy. Simplistic analyses of globalisation – and there are far too many – tend to regard the mere presence of foreign goods, services and images as evidence of the penetration and denigration of cultural life. This is particularly pronounced in western visions of nonwestern cultures, where without irony, they claim to speak about the cultural domination of many peoples around the globe by west-

ern cultural forms. A more important form of this argument contends that cultural autonomy – the ability to create, circulate and engage with cultural forms that relate meaningfully to people’s experiences and life-worlds – is eroded by the constant expansion of telecommunications and consumer markets and the effects of economies of scale. In general, current thinking on the impacts of cultural globalisation tends to stress the interplay of homogenisation and heterogenization and the importance of situated analyses in examining the ‘power geometry’ of globalisation.

**This partial and compressed list** of important movements and currents that have centred the idea of culture needs to be read in combination with an opposing list that argues for its radical decentring. The reasons for this are implicit in the nature of the movements discussed; if a focus on and resort to culture has been crucial and necessary under particular circumstances, it follows that a shift away from it may be necessary for consequent reasons.

**(A)**

Culture is an idea that is over-accented, yet its usage always involves a range of tangled senses. To quote from *Resituating Culture*: “In contemporary societies and public discourses, the term ‘culture’ has become a powerful and commonly held currency. Long regarded as one of the most complicated concepts in the human and social sciences, it increasingly takes on the appearance of a floating signifier attached to ways of life and life practices, collectivities based on location, nation, history, lifestyle and ethnicity, systems and networks of representation and meaning, and realms of artistic value and heritage” (2004:10). Thus, the more aspects of life culture is deployed to encompass and explain, the more opaque and vague its usages become. Speaking of culture may seem to refer to something self-evident – a group, a way of life, a national context – yet its history of usage means that it always activates far more than the utterance or reference may suggest or desire.

**(B)**

Despite this over-accenting, discussions of culture tend to prefer and normalise some usages over others. Culture has become a ubiquitous concept as a way of framing human interaction, however it is not widely recognised that its use is always an evaluative and political act. It has been widely noted that in contemporary discussions of multicultural-

ism, migration, and globalisation, culture is predominantly discussed in static and essentialising terms, privileging and standing in for communities of descent over and above other intersecting aspects of identity and self. If, as Terry Eagleton has argued, culture has historically involved intertwined senses of ‘making’ and ‘being made’, contemporary European societies display a distinct tendency to prefer bounded ideas of cultural communities. As *Resituating Culture* contends, “The idea of culture as the essentialised way of life of a people, often implicitly linked to geo-political territory, retains a disturbing degree of orthodoxy in Europe today”<sup>17</sup>. This is because, as many writers have noted, culture is a concept that lends itself easily to a variety of political rhetorics, and has a now unrivalled legitimacy in mobilising group identities. In some guises culture is a warm and cuddly concept, whereas in others it is central to boundary maintenance and politics of exclusion.

**(C)**

In Europe today this is most keenly felt in the politics of cultural nationalism, where citizenship has been increasingly decoupled from the state and reclaimed to a politics of national-ethnic-racialised belonging and legitimacy. The development of citizenship tests based on heritage rather than civic skills, widespread discussions of assimilation and incompatibility, and rhetoric about the ‘threat’ to ‘indigenous European cultures’ are not the sole preserve of the far right in Europe. Indeed, popular cultural nationalisms have thrived by mainstreaming the ‘concerns’ of the far right in amended discourses and policies. Such nationalism builds on simplifying feelings of belonging and community and amplifying threats and insecurities emanating from the decline of the welfare state (in many instances) and the increased ‘global figuration’ of national economics and politics. In this context, education through culture is not only about engaging with prevalent ways of understanding the world, but also a question of reflecting on the relationship of education to political motivations and strategies that encompass the educational context.

**(D)**

The overwhelming focus on culture as a marker of identity and community in multiculturalist projects has been criticised from a range of positions. Many criticisms have come from young people – particularly so-called ‘second generation migrants’ who are unwilling to be pigeon-holed as ethnic or cultural – and spoken for by ‘leaders of the community’ who have been sanctioned by outside powers. In the UK, multicultural-



ism has been criticised as a micro-colonial arrangement, where people are neatly organised into a cultural mosaic, and power is shared between the metropolitan centre and recognised ‘community mandarins’. The tendency to see and valorise people as belonging to cultural groups underplays and simplifies identity and the importance of gender, class, sexuality, disability and political allegiance in practices of identity as well as practices of discrimination. Moreover, a key criticism of multiculturalism has been that it imagines cultural recognition and appreciation to be the key demand of ethnic minorities. This cultural reductionism gives rise to both superficial dynamics and practices of cultural exchange, and compounds the tendency to see discrimination as the product of individual prejudice rather than material and political inequalities. For many, the apparently benign and progressive focus on culture works consciously and unconsciously to weaken antiracist politics.

**(E)**

A further aspect of the power-based critique of multiculturalism in point (d) is the ways in which the cultural definition of people contributes to their exoticisation and marginalisation. As Mark McGuinness writes, “...easily recognisable differences, in skin colour, language, religion, dress, foods...such ‘differences’ only actually register as differences if you look at them from the seemingly homogenous and stable platform of ‘mainstream’ white urban culture”<sup>18</sup>. This implies that the recognition of cultural difference is often not accompanied by a positional sense of how difference is constructed. In other words, recognition demands a consideration of who is recognised, how, by whom, on what terms, and in what power relationships. Ideas of cultural difference carry complex historical lineages, and shifting from using certain perspectives to appreciate rather than repress does not change the fundamental relationship of power and perspective. As Shalini Sinha writes, for example, what is often common to the experience of women of colour in Ireland is their positioning through residual ideas of racialised sexuality, whereby “our glorified ‘differences’, sometimes presented as ‘curiously attractive’ are still used to undermine us”<sup>19</sup> (2001:x)

**(F)** Culture’s political chauvinism is compounded by its descriptive inadequacy, and vice versa. Discussions of globalisation – a new, highly complex notion becoming increasingly important to Directorate of Youth and Sport work – emphasise the fluid, hybrid nature of socio-cultural experiences, and challenge the idea that cultural homogeneity was

anything more than the product of forms of imagining associated with national romanticism and the congruence of nation states and national (racialised) communities. What John Tomlinson terms connectivity, an ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterise social, economic and cultural life in modern societies, is increasingly a banal everyday aspect of the fabric of cultural experience, yet it is not captured by many orthodox notions of culture. Dominant notions of culture that emphasise coherence, homogeneity and boundedness are inadequate both as descriptive possibilities and fail to notice how essentialising cultural politics are a reaction to aspects of globalisation.

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## THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

The over-inflation and politicisation of culture outlined in the previous section has given rise to a debate in anthropology – the discipline most associated with the concept – as to whether responsible anthropology involves disowning the concept, or working to reshape and calibrate it<sup>20</sup>. A similar question confronts the practitioners who have done most to promote the importance and benefits of intercultural learning as a core subject and priority of European youth work. I exempt from this discussion the welcome prevalence of intercultural learning as an educational philosophy guiding choices made in the planning of activities – what chapter two will discuss as *backstage* intercultural education. In this section the focus is one the ways in which intercultural learning, or “ICL” as it is cheerfully and mystifyingly branded, has become a near compulsory training aspect of almost all international training programmes. If we relate the demand for adequacy amidst societal complexity to the intellectual and political complexity of culture, what are the implications for intercultural learning?

### (A)

A primary consideration, suggested by the drift of the points made above, is that the constant emphasis on anything called ‘intercultural learning’ compounds the tendency to centre culture as the key resource and problematic in social life and youth work activities. If intercultural learning is omnipresent, it suggests that it is a core pillar of any type of youth work, and this is simply not sustainable. Most trainers will be familiar with the programme planning process whereby a post-it with ICL written on it

is stuck to the empty planning grid, just after 'farewell party'. While this is a glib example, it is meant to suggest that intercultural learning has become a staple part of international trainings, and perhaps something of an expectation, yet very often the issues being discussed may be better off discussed under some other heading. Equally often, the reliance on intercultural learning stems from the need to gather a range of social, political and cultural issues into a limited period of time. Whatever the exigencies, there is no doubt to my mind that intercultural learning has sucked the oxygen out of spaces for political education, social analysis, informed and reflective discussions of youth contexts, and so forth.

**(B)**

Following on from this omnipresence, it is obvious that very many different ways of addressing intercultural learning as a topic exist. There is often a sense in training that the main need of trainers is a constant supply of new approaches, whether for novelty or to widen the options available in planning sessions and activities. In intercultural learning I would argue that what is missing is a focus on navigating and evaluating the welter of materials that are merely a toolbox or a *Google* search away. What is also largely absent is the realisation that this methodological and discursive inquiry is also a political responsibility. To return to Wolfgang Welsch's analysis of culture as a descriptive and prescriptive notion, Welsch continues by arguing that it is possible to approach culture as open and in process, or as binding and essential. To quote:

*If one tells us that culture is to be a homogeneity event, then we practice the required coercions and exclusions [...] The 'reality' of culture, is, in this sense, always a consequence too of our conceptions of culture. One must therefore be aware of the responsibility which one takes on in propagandising concepts of this type<sup>21</sup>.*

It is my impression that too much intercultural learning is either loosely premised on the closed ideas critiqued by Welsch and elsewhere in this paper, or unaware of the implications that different, historically generated ideas of culture have for the educational premises and frameworks offered. Intercultural education is a broad area, and the debates I have outlined here are also played out in conflicting approaches and methodologies. For example, as Iben Jensen outlines in her contribution to *Resituating Culture*, intercultural communication research can be divided into main traditions of functionalist approaches and poststructuralist

approaches. Functionalist approaches – including the widely misapplied work of Geerd Hofstede – try “[...] to predict how culture will influence communication, focusing on identifying culture as a barrier against more effective communication”<sup>22</sup>. Poststructuralist approaches, on the other hand, already assume that communication is discursive and dialogical, never exact and closed, and that intercultural communication needs to be seen in terms of power, context, political discourse, activated constructions of the Other<sup>23</sup>, and so forth. An awareness of these differences is not a theoretical nicety or an optional extra for diligent trainers, it fundamentally impacts on how an educational approach frames a session and the parameters of discussion that are likely to emerge.

(C)

The absence of clear debate about the implications of entangled forms and philosophies of intercultural learning can be exacerbated by the training frameworks within which intercultural learning is delivered. The European youth field has successfully developed a range of materials that are in wide circulation, and some are far more successful at developing a critical approach to the construction of intercultural education than others. However many materials are assimilated from other practices and contexts, and there is undeniably a vogue for organising these assimilated elements as ‘tools’ that can be transferred from situation to situation, if a disclaimer as to the responsibility of the trainer is appended. A contention of this paper has been that limiting, essentialising and politically retrogressive concepts of culture predominate, however it is my impression that this is less through conviction than a lack of attention to the ways in which different texts, materials and approaches are generated within different traditions of education, and the ways in which they migrate into non-formal education. In our current training context, intercultural education has become a basic trade for freelance trainers, who often work for short and irregular periods of time with groups and organisations. This form of work economy prefers theories and modules that are transferable and adaptable, which is both understandable and dependent on the individual practice of the trainer. Nevertheless, there are grounds for arguing that many of the approaches that have so promiscuously been incorporated into youth practice are radically incommensurable. At this point I will take the liberty of including an extract from a previous article of mine entitled “Culture as Experience, Concept and Public Idea”<sup>24</sup>. This extract highlights key ways in which widespread assumptions and practices of intercultural learning display their inadequacy:

**(i) Culture as a static, bounded entity**

Despite the range of research (see Vertovec & Cohen [eds.] 2002) which details people approaching their identities as complex, shifting interactions of place, ethnicity, nationality, gender, occupation, lifestyle and affiliations, many models of intercultural learning persist in ascribing a

**While these approaches retain a certain value, reliance on them obscures not only the complex nature of identities, but also the processes of cultural change and hybridity touched on previously.**

primary cultural identity. More often than not, this primary identity co-joins nationality and received ideas of national culture, or in the case of minority communities in dominant models of multiculturalism, ethnic identity with ethnic cultural groups (Watson 2000: 109). Very often cultures are imagined as being internally

coherent and homogenous, and as exacting a largely similar influence over and loyalty from group members. As the “Intercultural Learning Model” of The Grove Consultants advises us, it takes time to ‘see the inherent logic of another culture’ ([www.grove.com/about/model](http://www.grove.com/about/model)). This is also the approach of the ‘Iceberg Model of Culture’ still widely employed in youth training (Gillert op.cit: 18).

While these approaches retain a certain value, reliance on them obscures not only the complex nature of identities, but also the processes of cultural change and hybridity touched on previously. Notions of internal homogeneity are historically dubious – usually a creation of the will to power – and to present them as a way of understanding contemporary change is irresponsibly reductive. Culture is here presented as an exact science (the Grove model involves working through cycles; “The more successful intercultural cycles one completes, the more capacity one builds for embracing cultural differences”) yet frozen within its parameters are theories that approach culture as a system, and insist on this despite the fluid and increasingly anti-schematic character of cultural habitats. They contain the fossilised remnants of socio-anthropological ideas formulated long before the kinds of processes we are witnessing today, and which have since been thoroughly critiqued for their unsustainable emphasis on culture as a bounded entity (Cowan et al: 2001).

Ideas of culture neatly summarised and nestling in methodologies are not neutral lenses for observation. These approaches to intercultural education ask participants to imagine themselves in cultural capsules, and anti-intuitively invite them to pass their far more complex cultural

existences through static modular prescriptions. In my experience, it is common to witness people dismissing this kind of training as irrelevant to their realities.

### **(ii) Culture and incommensurable realities**

In emphasising responsibility to ideas and the propagandising of culture, Welsch (1999) raises two further points that warrant attention. *A Workbook on International Negotiation* (2002), produced by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, replicates a model that promises to provide key insights into culture's consequences. Despite preliminary qualifications concerning the complexity of culture and the possibilities of internal differences within cultures\societies\nations (the text uses these terms interchangeably), the model defines culture as the 'collective mental programming which distinguishes one group or category of people from another'. In an adaptation of Geert Hofstede's model (1991) the chapter scores nations along five value dimensions, and in a parody of participative education, it invites participants to take part in an assignment that requires them to 'score a selected number of countries and discuss this in your group' (ibid: 34).

While it would be myopic to dismiss the complex purchase of national identities, models such as this one continue to imagine culture as congruent only with the borders of nationstates. It could be argued that as a management tool it functions merely as a basic orientation device for a global management class. Yet this management model is included in a NGO handbook that circulates in very different circles, and where the need to engage with culture as an educational subject may be prompted by very different contexts and target groups. In presenting this theory with minimum contextualisation, a resource of this nature offers as widely applicable a model that is likely to be wholly incommensurable with the needs of a range of educators and groups. In terms of the question Welsch posits on responsibility, it seems dubious in the current geo-political context to foreground a model that focuses on cultural difference as the locus of conflict. Not to mention one that encourages managers, trainers or youth workers to analyse their colleagues and employees for indicative mental-cultural software.

### **(iii) Culture and the absence of politics**

The accents placed on terms are not innocent gifts of nature; they are gradually inscribed there by social interests for broadly ideological reasons. The idea of culture that we see in the resources discussed previously

may seem at best general and at worst banal, but they assume an idea of culture that posits essentialised, bounded ways of life, replete with internally coherent systems of meaning and value, grounded in geo-political locations. To observers of what has been termed ‘the culturalisation of politics’, this recipe will sound grimly familiar. Jane K. Cowan et al observed that while anthropology has increasingly discredited the idea of culture that we see in these forms of intercultural education, anthropologists have noted the

*[...] increasing prevalence of culture as a rhetorical object – often in a highly essentialised form – in contemporary political talk. (2001: 9)*

By unproblematically presenting culture in this way, these approaches naturalise an idea that has increasing import as an exclusionary political strategy. By way of illustration, we could consider the charming text on ‘The right to a cultural identity’ produced by the Austrian Freedom Party. Article 2.2 acknowledges openly that the coexistence and cooperation of different cultural groups have produced Austrian identity, and, in article 3.4, that:

*The awareness of the special qualities of one’s own people is inseparably linked to the willingness to respect what is special about other people (www.fpoe.at/fpoe/bundesgst/programm/chapter4.htm) (emphasis in the original).*

In terms of the kind of intercultural education under discussion here, what could possibly be controversial about this statement? Both assume that different groups with their inherent differences encounter each other, and appreciation of the other is developed through reflection on one’s own culture. This could even be seen as a complementary policy statement for those that preach ‘diversity appreciation’ as their central aim. Yet these ideas of intercultural learning seem unaware that they promote an idea of culture that is central to the welfare chauvinism of cultural nationalism. As Gerard Delanty illustrates, ethnic-cultural nationalism – often a product of social fragmentation and neo-liberal attack on the welfare state – has reclaimed citizenship to a politics of cultural identity and belonging, and constructs migrants not just as culturally other but as contributing to the erosion of state provision (2000). As the Freedom Party rhetoric suggests, they have no problem with a paradigm of cultural relativism that recognises and even celebrates cul-

tural difference, as long as the culturally different are located where they 'belong' and have no material impact.

Intercultural learning developed in the context of antiracism and social activism cannot allow itself to be made vulnerable by such political autism. The grounds of this rhetoric are readily contestable, yet by abstracting culture from the discourses in which culture is actually discussed and accented, this kind of education prepares the individual living and working in a multicultural society to celebrate diversity, not to question the ways in which diversity is constructed and politically instrumentalised. This is what Welsch illustrates in emphasising the responsibility of propagandizing certain ideas of culture, as in this instance it runs the risk of strengthening the foundations of the very politics it claims to oppose.

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**The question is not whether or not culture should be engaged with, but how, in relation to whom, to what extent, in interrelation with what, and with which underlying meanings.**

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(D)

It is sometimes argued that criticising the congruency of culture in people's lives is a form of elite cosmopolitanism; the perspective of those that travel, mingle and professionally engage with these issues. Apart from the assumptions inherent in that kind of stereotyping, these points maintain the opposite; that the dominance of certain approaches is creating a gap between the framework of education and those that entrust their time and energy to it. The question is not whether or not culture should be engaged with, but how, in relation to whom, to what extent, in interrelation with what, and with which underlying meanings. The primacy of culture in many political debates, is, for example, a key challenge for European youth work. As C.W. Watson argues, the contemporary culturalisation of politics and horizons articulates a need for particular dimensions of self-hood: expressive identity and self-respect, a sense of belonging and commitment to place, a sense of history and link to the past<sup>25</sup>. These are pressing questions that can be discussed in relation to ideas and practices of culture, or as is often done, reified in approaches that assume that this is what culture is trans-contextually about. Intercultural education should name, unmask and engage with the desires, politics and assumptions that are refracted through culture, rather than unproblematically associate them with education about culture.



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## THE CHALLENGES OF INADEQUACY

### **Essentialisation:**

as has been established, the dominant notions of culture in circulation tend to prefer visions of people living in somewhat bounded, immutable cultural groups, and are ill-equipped to integrate the experience of people with multiple allegiances and identities, and other crucially important aspects of affective and ascribed identities. As we have seen, a core critique of ‘recognition multiculturalism’ has been the tendency to lock people into mutually reinforcing cultural communities, with often severe repercussions for women and young people, whose identities and needs may not in any way be represented by the community. In training, the reliance on culture may contribute to a weakening of social analysis and reflection, as the answers “it’s cultural” and “it’s their culture” substitute for proper reflection as well as recognition of the limits of what we know (which is in and of itself an intercultural priority). People are undoubtedly socialised within, influenced by, and deeply attached to their communities of whatever kind, but it does not follow from this that cultural groups are internally homogenous, or that people wish to be primarily regarded as ‘members of a culture’. It is worth noting that this criticism of essentialism does not imply that the end goal of intercultural education is the philosophical acceptance of anti-essentialism. Rather, it is to encourage a critical engagement with what these positions entail and how they manifest themselves in actual contexts, as Les Back contends: “The choice is presented pointedly as one between viewing cultures as rooted and fixed and a vision of cultural processes as in a constant state of flux producing creative and promiscuous routeways of identification. What is omitted in the deafening row over ‘essentialism’ versus ‘anti-essentialism’ is the complex interplay between these two impulses at the everyday level”<sup>26</sup>. Right now, the primary impulse in educational frameworks is an essentialist one.

### **Depoliticisation:**

the simultaneous reduction and elevation of everything to a cultural register is rampantly depoliticising. While practices of tolerance and awareness are crucially important, they are sometimes presented as the endgame of intercultural learning, as if a critical mass of the educated and aware will create a world where, as some cynics might put it, ‘we can just learn to get along’. This form of cultural analysis both assumes that cultural identities are inherently problematic, essentially different and

probably conflictual, yet it reduces the many dimensions of conflict to questions of cultural compatibility and understanding. What needs to be recognised here is that constructing peoples' motivations and behaviour as cultural is an inherently political act; the political conflicts in Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia were often characterised by outside commentators as cultural, ethnic and thus atavistic, and this lazy focus obscured the political issues which were being played out in often highly complex ways<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, as many anti-racist activists have pointed out, state power is often happily complicit in the illusion of cultural difference as the basis of discrimination, as it is far easier to throw some funds at education and awareness raising than to admit to the deep foundations of institutional and state racism in modern European societies. This argument has been most notably developed recently by the American cultural critic George Yudice in his discussion of culture as a useful global resource, where he argues that the increase in investment and focus on cultural projects and community involvement in cultural expression is an expedient means to an end; mobilising cultural resources to tackle (and mask) social problems and to ultimately ensure governability in neo-liberal societies<sup>28</sup>.

### **Individualisation:**

closely related to the problem of depoliticisation is the problem of individualisation, which at first sounds like a contradictory result of an emphasis on 'living in cultures'. However dominant forms of intercultural learning – which rightly stress the individual responsibility of the person and citizen – tend to approach racism as an individual pathology, an aberration that can be addressed by educating the person, and this obscures the institutional and political-economic fundamentals of racism and discrimination. Individual prejudice does exist and can be reflected on and addressed, but it is not the central locus of the problem. As Alana Lentin writes; “racism is typically described as an individual problem, often in psychological terms, that connects between ‘attitudes’ and ‘prejudices’ based, it is said, on ‘ignorance’. Racism is, therefore, generally described as the problem of those with too little exposure to the positive qualities associated with ‘cultural’ or ‘ethnic’ difference; and too much exposure to the mainly economic disadvantages that such ‘difference’ is said to bring with it”<sup>29</sup> (2004; X). In training terms, this is often present in the assumption that getting people together, or exposing groups to each other, has the inevitable effect of increasing tolerance and the appreciation of cultural difference<sup>30</sup>.

**Relativisation:**

the prevalence of cultural relativism in anti-racism work and multiculturalist models is mirrored by its appearance in intercultural education. Cultural relativism – like all unsettling discourses in their time – was an extremely important way of emphasising that there is no ‘outside’; external positions of validity that are the exclusive property of particular ways of life and knowing. However the radical nature of such critiques of moral knowledge has often resulted in positions of cultural *laissez faire*. There is no doubt that many approaches to intercultural learning do address cultural relativism as a paralysing position, but it has to be recognised that this potential will be limited as long as the educational approach implicitly sanctions ‘billiard ball’ theories of culture<sup>31</sup>. Cultural relativism is most evidently in conflict with the tenets of human rights education, but must be distinguished from arguments about human rights and cultural particularity (relativism tends to regard ‘western discourses’ of human rights as a violence towards non-western conceptions of the individual and justice, whereas discussions of particularity examine the ways in which discussions of rights are often different in concrete situations around the globe). Cultural relativism is an understandable reaction to the weight of western reflexivity, yet it often naively assumes a logic of the ‘west and the rest’, and is often unable to see the ways in which dominant elites and power blocks use a rhetoric of cultural relativism and western imperialism to mask their own domestic will to and often monopoly on power. In training situations, cultural relativism is often a default position given the complexity of unknown situations, however it is increasingly at odds with current attempts in European training to mainstream gender as an ever-present issue in youth work<sup>32</sup>.

**Orthodox-ification:**

This aspect is more fully discussed in chapter two, but it can be understood as a product of the importance attached to intercultural learning and the transferability of approaches that is often assumed. It manifests itself in terms of assumed results and magical solutions; if I do a youth exchange it will make people more tolerant, and in the calcification of a certain form of political correctness in youth work. Intercultural learning lends itself to the circulation of a closed economy of expression, and seasoned seminar-goers learn – for many reasons – to work within it. However this writer has had the impression that this often cements a limited plane of expression, and I have seen many participants labelled as ‘racist’ or unacceptable for expressing their opinions in ways that

seem clumsy or dissonant. What this indicates, as will be explored in chapter two, is the ways in which intercultural learning discourses are now actually inadequate for discussing many socio-cultural contexts. A further aspect of the closure of orthodoxies is the ways in which value-based education is often no more than the *rehearsal of the values we value*. It has been noted during recent research seminars that – and admittedly the reasons for this are complex – there is a tendency for youth work discussions to progress from an assertion of valuable values to questions of their operationalisation, without lingering in the realms of ideology. Ideology is a dirty word in contemporary discussions, but its importance lies in reminding us that values sound similar until they are activated within inter-subjective dialogue. Everyone agrees with empathy, but not everybody agrees with euthanasia.

### **De-youthification:**

Leaving aside the clumsy phrase, a telling element of the failures of intercultural learning has been the ways in which it has come to limit fine-grained discussions of young people and the specificities of their experiences. Simply put there is an assumption that if young people are seen as members of cultures, we have grasped the most important aspects of their experience. However, we do not need to resort to the extremes of this critique in the examination of multiculturalism to see how flaccid this is. In the triangle of policy-research-practice, it has always been mystifying that the axis youth research -policy has been so much stronger than the axis youth research -training. This may well in part be due to the assumption promoted by intercultural learning that one's culture is the key to first order understanding of one's situation, behaviour, attitudes or opinions.

\* This article is an short version of the *'Plastic, Political and Contingent': Culture and Intercultural Learning in Directorate of Youth and Sport Activities. Discussion document based on the evaluation of the Long-term Training Course Intercultural Learning and Recent Research Activities*. The whole evaluation, including the second and third chapters: 'The Long Term Training Course Intercultural Learning: Navigating in a Changing Landscape' and 'Mapping new routes' can be found at [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Training/Training\\_courses/2005\\_LTTC\\_intercultural\\_lng\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Training/Training_courses/2005_LTTC_intercultural_lng_en.pdf)

### **Notes**

- 1 Richard, Jean-Francois (2003) *High Noon: Twenty Global Problems, Twenty Years to Solve Them*.

- 2 Appadurai, Arjun: Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination, in Appadurai (ed.) (2003) *Globalization*.
- 3 Such discussions including considering this course with other trainers, discussions held at the Trainers' Pool Consultative Meeting in January 2004, discussing the assumed relationship between intercultural learning and conflict transformation at the relevant training courses in 2002 and 2003. Some of the conversations can also be related to subsequent publications; *Resituating Culture* (2004) is the clearest example.
- 4 Before this phrase gains further currency, it might be worth reflecting on the ways in which 'diverse modernities' suggests parallel development and plurality rather than overlap and divergence. This point is well made by Göran Therborn among others, in his discussion of what he calls 'Entangled Modernities' *European Journal of Social Theory* 6 (3).
- 5 Hoskins and Kloosterman, Titley and Holder: Youth Researchers and Youth Workers. *Coyote* Issue 8, 2004. *Coyote* is the magazine of the Council of Europe/European Commission Partnership addressing issues relating to youth training in Europe.
- 6 SALTO-YOUTH stands for Support and Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the European YOUTH programme. The website of the Trainers Online for Youth database is <http://www.salto-youth.net/toy/>. This search was carried out 20.12.04.
- 7 Otten, Hendrik (2002) "Study on trainers' competencies necessary for developing and implementing European level training activities in the youth field at high quality, and possible approaches for the assessment of these training competencies".
- 8 Gillert, Arne et al (2000) *Intercultural Learning T-Kit*, p. 14.
- 9 Hannerz, Ulf (1996) *Transnational Connections*, p. 31.
- 10 See for example Raymond Williams' discussion of the social conceptual history of culture in *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1972), and Terry Eagleton's polemical examination of culture's entangled senses of 'making' and 'being made' in *The Idea of Culture* (2000).
- 11 Barker, Chris (2002) *Making Sense of Cultural Studies: Central Problems and Critical Debates*, p. 84.
- 12 Welsch, Wolfgang, Transculturality: the Puzzling Forms of Culture Today in Featherstone & Lash (ed.) (1999) *Spaces of Culture*.
- 13 See Lentin, Alana: The Problem of Culture and Human Rights in the Response to Racism in Titley (ed.) (2004) *Resituating Culture* pp. 97-99, and *Racism and Anti-racism in Europe* (2004).
- 14 Tucker, Vincent. The Myth of Development: A Critique of Eurocentric Discourse in Munck and O'Hearn (ed.) (1999) *Critical Development Theory*, p. 3.
- 15 O'Connell, Colm: Citizenship and Multiculturalism: Equality, Rights and Diversity in Contemporary Europe in *Resituating Culture* (2004).
- 16 'Multicultural Citizenship' is an idea associated with the Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka and his book *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (1995). For a global overview of related concepts and programmes see C.W. Watson (2000) *Multiculturalism*.
- 17 See Titley, Gavan: Introduction to *Resituating Culture* (2004) p. 11.
- 18 McGuinness, Mark: Geographies with a Difference? Citizenship and Difference in Post-colonial Urban Spaces, in Blunt & McEwan (ed.) (2000) *Postcolonial Geographies*.
- 19 Sinha, Shalini: Generating Awareness for the Experiences of Women of Colour in Ireland in Lentin & McVeigh (ed.) (2002) *Racism and Anti-racism in Ireland*.
- 20 For example Arjun Appadurai, in keeping with what has been termed critical anthropology, argues that culture should be regarded as adjectival, as a process of culturalism in relation to group identities and politics in particular contexts. As he argues, culture as a noun carries the implication that "[...] culture is some kind of object, thing, or substance, whether physical or metaphysical. This substantialisation seems to bring culture back into the discursive space of race,

- the very idea it was originally designed to combat” *Modernity at Large: Cultural Consequences of Globalization* (1996: 12).
- 21 Welsch op.cit 1999: 200.
  - 22 Jensen, Iben, The Practice of Intercultural Communication: Reflections for Professionals in Intercultural Encounters in *Resituating Culture* (2004) p. 83.
  - 23 ‘The Other’ refers to general assumptions about other people that constitute identity as an intersubjective relationship and process, and that recognises that knowledge about oneself and others always interpenetrates. In cultural theory, ‘The Other’ often refers to the way in which different identities are placed in relations of difference and often inferiority to accepted norms, assumptions and practices.
  - 24 Published in Lauritzen, Peter and Hendrik Otten (ed.) (2004) *Jugendarbeit und Jugendpolitik in Europa*. In this publication the article is translated into German, therefore this English abstract is previously unpublished.
  - 25 Watson, C.W. (2000) *Multiculturalism* pp. 107-10.
  - 26 Back, Les (1996) *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture. Racisms and Multiculture in Young Lives*, p. 7.
  - 27 As an example of this, the film analyst Martin McLoone examines the ways in which violence in Northern Ireland is often represented in film as inevitable, ritual, and ‘in the blood and air’. See McLoone (2000) *Irish Film: The Emergence of Contemporary Cinema*.
  - 28 Yudice, George (2003) *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in a Global Age*.
  - 29 Lentin, Alana: Racial States, Anti-racist Responses: Picking Holes in ‘Culture’ and ‘Human Rights’ in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol.7 No.4 (2004).
  - 30 On this assumption -so beloved for example of exchange and immersion programmes -Anna Bagnoli’s essay Constructing the Hybrid Identities of Europeans in *Resituating Culture* provides some sobering empirical analysis.
  - 31 A ‘billiard ball’ theory of culture is a shorthand way of referring to theories that tend to imagine bounded cultures meeting or encountering each other, often through supposed representatives.
  - 32 The Human Rights education programme has placed an increasing emphasis on re-mainstreaming gender as an implicit power dimension of all youth work situations. This has occurred through publications – Ramberg, Ingrid (2001) *Violence Against Young Women in Europe* Seminar Report and Titley, Gavan (2003) *Youth Work with Boys and Young Men as a Means to preventing Violence in Everyday Life* – and in seminars and training courses, most recently “Training course on gender-based violence” (EYCB June 2004). It is worth mentioning here that many of the trainers involved in this activity have become increasingly convinced that the familiar discourse of cultural relativism in intercultural learning has facilitated a widespread dismissal of the importance of gender in social politics, and in some cases in transparently hostile attacks on anything regarded as ‘feminism’.

# Against the Waste of Experiences in Intercultural Learning

Dedicated to Jean-Marie Bergeret and Peter Lauritzen, for their guidance, for their intellectual rigueur and for their inspiration.

*Teresa Cunha & Rui Gomes*

*“Ce qui nous manque  
c’est le courage de comprendre tout ce que nous savons  
et d’en tirer les conséquences.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Intercultural learning has played a key role in non-formal education processes with young people, especially those associated with youth programmes and activities of the Council of Europe and of the European Commission.

The main purpose of intercultural learning – to inflect ethnocentric perspectives, fight prejudices and promote solidarity actions that support equality in human dignity and respect for the plurality of cultural identities – remains fully valid and more relevant than ever in European societies whose futures are further intertwined and interdependent with the rest of the world.

This article seeks to engage in a critique of intercultural learning by restating its key premises, exploring current challenges and proposing a renewed criticism of the concepts and practices of intercultural learning as a way to make possible the potential it carries for social transformation. The article also explores a possible relationship between intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue in which the former can be understood as the necessary educational approach to the latter.

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## INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

One of the major sociological features of the twentieth century in Europe was the clear acknowledgement of youth as a social group and a public entity with a powerful voice, able to claim changes and ask for real par-

ticipation in social and political terrains. These developments contrasted with the instrumentalisation of ‘youth’ by the totalitarian regimes of the first half of the century. This became more evident after the sixties when youth movements began challenging, seriously, the *status quo* of political actors and public power. One of the most interesting results of this movement triggered by political action was the inclusion of ‘youth participation’ as one of the major topics in the political discourse and, symmetrically, a major concern for educators and policy makers (Guilherme, 2002:1). This societal atmosphere and turbulence in Europe and the intense exchange between European and non-European thinkers brought to the arena of the educational discourse a new approach which was named ‘critical pedagogy’. This critical pedagogy is not only a critique of the past but aims to give education a strong potential of reflection, dialogue, dissent, empowerment, and democratic learning, that is, to contribute to the shaping of active and autonomous citizens based on critical thinking. As Paulo Freire<sup>2</sup> alerted at the time, education is intrinsically a political act because it does not aim to establish just a formal literacy, but the ability to read the world in a critical way in order to transform it (Freire, 1970). So, ethics are crucial and are at the heart of education (Giroux, 1989, 1997). The critique of critical pedagogy that is nowadays fashionable in some circles – notably by partisans of a focus on the ‘primary’ function of education, which critical pedagogy has never been against, in any case – is often an attack on the ethical foundations of critical education, even if disguised by a denunciation of its excesses.

Some years later, Europe, mainly in the early nineties, was intensively shaken again by profound changes: the fall of the wall in Berlin and its enormous political and social consequences; the war in the Balkans countries; the intensification of globalisation processes<sup>3</sup>; the generalised dismantling of welfare states; the new demographic realities of increasingly older European societies; the perceived increase of migration ‘waves’ from non-European countries as well the new transnational alliances among workers’ unions and social movements and a new awareness of common inheritances of humanity: these are some of the most important macro events that have had an effect on the way that young people, politicians and educators have started to re-think education.

Education has become a clear political stake that concerns schools and the context outside schools – the so-called non-formal education and out-of-school activities – for the construction of a new subjectivity, let’s say, a renewed European identity based on a certain set of cultural specificities: a democratic Europe from the west to the east, from the south



to the north; the social European model informed by the Rule of Law and Human Rights; a multicultural Europe living in peace together and an economically efficient Europe, which education and lifelong learning would make the most competitive space in the world by 2010 (Lisbon agenda). In continuity with the first experiences of the eighties, it was in this context that the recognition of the value and importance of non-formal education transformed it in a European policy aiming especially at young people.

Progressively, the youth policies of the European institutions would adopt some of these realities and transform them into objectives. The various European youth programmes, including youth exchanges and the European voluntary service schemes, have gradually become instruments for these aims, provided with specific resources, clear aims and functioning as the necessary complement of schooling. It also became clear that the ‘critical pedagogy’ born in those now challenging decades of the sixties and seventies was not able to change the school system as deeply as necessary, and as had been the hope of those generations<sup>4</sup>. New spaces for ‘citizen education’ and renewed methodologies started to be recognized among the youth initiatives and youth organizations.

During the eighties and nineties, in the Council of Europe, especially within its youth sector and its educational policy, a relatively new concept became the ‘heart’ of the most enthusiastic discussions and methodological thoughts and proposals, ‘intercultural learning’. The focus on this concept fed on various factors: the evident rise and complexity of cultural diversity in Europe, the youth role in the public realm and the heritage of ‘critical pedagogy’ that always accompanied it: dialogue, dialogical relations between subjects and communities, democracy, redistribution of power and peaceful social transformation. The most striking example of this is probably the development of the programme of training courses of the European Youth Centre, in particularly the period leading to the creation and popularisation of the long-term training courses in which intercultural learning became an aim for, and an educational approach to youth cooperation. In parallel to this process, the Youth for Europe programme (and its successors) played a key role in streamlining intercultural learning.

Using Michel Foucault’s powerful work on the *archaeology of the knowledge* (1972) where he shows the complexity of the discourse and asks, rather for the specificity of European thought, the differences developed within it over the time, we argue that ‘intercultural learning’ in European youth work has a complex and a multifunctional history. The

importance of this analytical approach is to ensure and clarify the discursive formations and the historical context, as well as the networking rules: these establish what is meaningful in order to allow an assertive justification to explain why, in the last two decades, ‘intercultural learning’ had a very important role in the development of critical thinking and innovative methodologies promoted by European institutions, including the Council of Europe and the European Commission<sup>5</sup>.

### **What is intercultural learning - really - about?**

The works of Hendrik Otten (1997) – with his ‘Ten theses on the correlation between youth encounters’ – and Peter Lauritzen (1998) – had a key role in establishing the conceptual frameworks and the epistemological foundations of intercultural learning.<sup>6</sup>

There are probably as many definitions of intercultural learning as there are of culture. We would like to use the one put forward by Equipo Claves that sees intercultural education as “a process of social education aimed at promoting a positive relationship between people and groups from different cultural backgrounds” (Equipo Claves, 1992:82), not only because it is at the basis of the Education Pack ‘All Different – All Equal’, but because it recognises the necessary correlation between personal/individual learning/action and group/collective learning/action. This is also what makes it a very valid approach for intercultural dialogue and particularly for a critical ownership of the intercultural dialogue speech by practitioners of intercultural learning and intercultural education.

It is important at this point to re-visit some of the fundamental topics, which ‘Intercultural Learning’ – as a concept but also as an educational methodology – brought to the discourse, into the debate and into the educational practices. We chose three of the most relevant issues that constructed the *corpus* of this quest for a positive intercultural living in European context.

#### **Tolerance of ambiguity**

First of all we would like to refer to the concept of ‘the tolerance of ambiguity’ (Otten, 1997)<sup>7</sup>. This concept meant/means, on the one hand, the recognition of the cultural differences amongst European societies and communities; on the other hand, acknowledging the intrinsic uncompleted character of each cultural system and, therefore, acceptance of the ambiguity and multiple uncertainties generated by the cultural encounter<sup>8</sup>.

As stated above, the crucial potential of this concept of ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ is not only based on the recognition of diversity and difference, but also to learn how to learn from and work positively with it. It does also mean including uncertainty, in-determination in education – which is already revolutionary because education by definition

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should be normative and reproductive. Ultimately, this means not only developing the respect and reverence by the existence of the ‘Other’ but also educating our minds and social behaviour to the ‘unknown’ as a positive cultural research browser in order to enlarge our capacities of dialogue and living together.

The very modern presumption that everything has to be explained and verified is seriously challenged by this concept. In fact, ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ is the precondition of any intercultural approach that de-centres the discourse and the practices from the dominant culture, ensuring that it is possible to voice what is considered the ‘margins’. Following this reasoning, ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ is a requisite to a dialogical route in the process of which even we do/will not master every element. This concept announces the emancipation for all, rather than the assimilation of some.

Some would state that ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ is, in this sense, a post-modern concept. However it is important to stress that this concept and its translation into educational methodologies ought not to be used as a mere celebration of the differences, but a common effort to find multiple senses and potentialities from the cultural encounters. It is a powerful tool of empowerment for local and global transformation.

Peter Lauritzen conceptualised much of this innovative insight and in a cooperative way constructed operational frameworks that could be applied to different educative activities as a paradigm of ‘European Education’. The heuristic<sup>9</sup> capacity of the ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ in education has been demonstrated by the development of an important range of European training courses, workshops, and forums, realised and evaluated since the early nineties at the European Youth Centres or supported by its qualified trainers and advisors. At the *heart* of these initiatives was this main idea: it is possible to live together in peace if we tolerate building up a Europe where the *other*, the *unknown*, takes part of it and is fully recognised as constitutional to its richness. Intercultural

learning implies this discovery and transgression (Lauritzen, 1998) as well as being able to deal positively with insecurity and uncertainty. The ambiguity concerns the very concept of culture and cultural determination: it will be impossible to interpret and explain facts and behaviours on the basis of cultural diversity alone, while at the same time expanding the capacity for cultural competence. Intercultural learning values knowledge about cultural diversity while at the same time it implies a relativisation of the role of cultural knowledge. Otherwise, the culturally competent will be the interpreter of the other in the same way that Orientalists<sup>10</sup> sought to understand and conceptualise better the 'Oriental people' than the ones concerned.

### **Diatopical hermeneutics<sup>11</sup>**

Another competence associated to 'intercultural learning' practices and its theoretical discussions was/is the relationship between majority groups and minority groups in the European social and political context (Brander, Gomes et al., 1998; Council of Europe, 2004a). It is clear that diversity inside Europe happens socially and educationally within a power relations system where there are some who see themselves and are perceived as the majority, and those who are perceived or who feel they are the minority. The endless discussion about the overlapping identities and how, through them, each person can live as a member of a majority and at the same time belong to minority group is an important question, but is not the main concern of our analysis here. We believe that 'intercultural learning' aims explicitly to question ethnocentrism and its power to become normative (as in becoming the norm), the mainstream to which the other cultures have to be confronted and evaluated.

In this sense, approaching, discussing and educating for positive relations between majorities and minorities is a strong political and ethical standpoint. It means that we recognise and use cultural dynamism, global interdependency, and common responsibilities (Gomes, 1998: 75-77), as analytical and educational tools, putting into question the prevalence of one cultural mode over another one. In other words, a monolithic reason versus a cosmopolitan reason (Cunha, 2007). This can be criticised as cultural relativism, but in fact it is not. The main argument is that these dialogues and relationships amongst/between majorities and minorities have to be based on the development of mutual empathy, equality in human dignity and mutual recognition. This mutual humanisation (i.e. in seeing and accepting the others as fellow human beings with needs and aspirations of equal value and legitimacy to one's own) requires

responsive translation systems between cultures and powerful work methodologies. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004; 2006) proposes a ‘diatopical hermeneutics’, which means that an emancipatory ‘intercultural learning’ has to adopt procedures that recognise that all cultural systems have concepts of human dignity, respect for the others, peaceful

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relationship modes, and positive conflict solving mechanisms. By refusing what he calls the “laziness of the modern reason”, we can empower individuals and communities to build up social justice, and balanced relationships between majorities and minorities, provided

that we do not waste the best features that exist in each culture.

This is crucial to the very idea of a European construction process that has to question hegemonic relationships and cultural dominance characterised by the monopolistic “hijacking” of positive human values. And it is also, of course, of paramount importance to shape intercultural dialogue between states and people in a globalised world where, precisely, some of the globalised elements may overshadow the local dimensions. The incapacity of ethnocentrism to provide education with strong answers to the complex questions faced by young people today is clear and increasingly accepted. This is why racism, sexism, hetero-sexism or xenophobia are topics to be dealt with by education, because they were and they are perceived, in each specific culture, as manifestations of, and blockages to the common good. So mutuality, ‘diatopical hermeneutics’, consists of discovering in every culture (majority or minority) their endogenous principles that inform non-racist, non-sexist, non-heterosexist and non-violent social practices. This means that inside every culture there are mechanisms that can be mobilised to construct an inclusive, respectful, peaceful society and a better Europe for everyone.

### **Intercultural learning and social change**

The third topic that we would like to address is about ‘intercultural learning’ as a tool for social change. It becomes clear that using ‘tolerance to

ambiguity' and 'diatopical hermeneutics' as the main framework for 'inter-cultural learning' we cannot avoid the following question: what happens if we put into practice those principles, values and methods on a Europe-wide scale? Europe would certainly change profoundly and the main actors of this change would be the young people who have been more exposed to this educational approach. So, why hasn't it happened already?



These three dimensions of intercultural learning have to be associated and thought over with two other notions, as argued by Lauritzen (1998) and Otten (1997). They are empathy and solidarity.

Empathy is the attitude to try to see things from the point of view of the other (or how the other would feel) and ultimately the ability to place oneself in new situations (*Ibid.*) is also a necessary step towards addressing prejudice and ethnocentrism that all of us have been educated into. Acknowledging that empathy itself is influenced by prejudice and that it must take into account the respect of the identity (and uniqueness) of the other, will be also the role of tolerance of ambiguity.

The learning function of solidarity is perfectly described by Lauritzen as "the practical, social and political side to empathy" (1998: 10) and includes the capacity to interact and work with others, undertaking social and political action and be able to challenge and transgress existing power structures. In the globalised post-modern society, a particular emphasis is being placed on the individual responsibility to solidarity, as in inter-generational solidarity, citizenship education or the concern for environment protection, particularly strong with the concerns for human security, global warming and climate change, for example, in which the calls for individual responsibility often mask the inability of consequent political actions. In intercultural learning, and *a fortiori* in intercultural dialogue, the meaning of solidarity has to be rediscovered so as to recognise, for example, the solidarities of those who are the target of our solidarity and the need to take into account historical injustices.

Within Europe, the sense of solidarity also has to be reassessed so as to be placed back to the heart of European integration, especially for the young generations who discover 'Europe' as a matter of fact. In social terms, the concept of solidarity should also be used to balance the (excess) weight sometimes given to cultural difference and diversity in relation to social cohesion. Cultural identities are not the only determining factor in social relations and they can certainly not explain, nor legitimise, situations of social exclusion and growing levels of acceptance of poverty and misery as unavoidable. The role of human rights

education, in this respect, can only be highlighted in the same sense that human rights education and intercultural learning serve fundamentally the same purpose of securing equality in human dignity and the fight against all forms of discrimination.

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we have in our hands not only an innovative re-interpretation of critical thinking and critical pedagogy, but also a relevant accumulated knowledge about its possibilities and limitations. In fact, we do recognise that all this work - done all around Europe, with so many different young people, qualifying

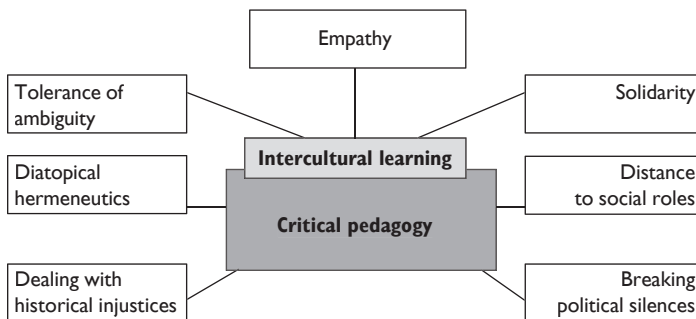
hundreds of multipliers and trainers to disseminate and make operational these education values - is far from being a widespread reality. On the contrary, the recent years have brought more questions and more awareness about the possible limits of ‘intercultural learning’ than ever before. Somehow it has created a discredit of the ‘intercultural learning’ because it did not produce that decisive cultural change in order to create that balanced and peaceful Europe that the majority of Europeans dreamed of.

“The limits of intercultural learning are, in this respect, the same as the limits of any educational programme” (Bergeret, 1995: 3). They are also narrowed by the inherent freedom and creativity that are associated with intercultural learning in non-formal education practices. The popularisation of intercultural learning as mere techniques for group work and simulations of culture has, of course, not contributed to its success outside the circle of the converted. But we should certainly avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

It is clear that the ‘faith’ in education has to be harmoniously questioned by a rationality which comprehends that deep changes are crossroads between various and complex factors and instruments. The theme of this reflection gives us some clues that can be useful for a more complete and complex analysis. Firstly, we are convinced that this discredit of the potentialities of ‘intercultural learning’ does not help to interpret the new societal conditions that have emerged in recent years where terms such as *unavoidable capitalist concentration, terrorism, exclusivity, fundamentalism, segregation, fear* and *insecurity*, amongst others, have

became a globalised crucial concern. On the contrary, ‘Intercultural Learning’ and its associated concepts represent an important tool for emancipation, justice, peaceful co-existence and addressing global concerns together. Paulo Freire, as well as Giroux (1997), both underline in their analyses that the right step forward is to pass from the ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ (Freire, 1970) to the ‘pedagogy of hope’ (Freire, 2004). This means that we need to look carefully at the new conditions, and to use our collective genius to give significance to what is emerging.

Secondly, it is necessary to renew the collective resilience to act, transform and construct a Europe of and for the People and Social Justice, Intense Democratic Values, Inalienable Human Rights and the recognition of the pluriversalities of human dignity. It is interesting to recall here the inspirational alert made by Cândido Grzybowski<sup>12</sup> when he states that the worst thing that hegemonic globalisation is producing is the absence of plural thinking and the destruction of the capacity of hope and dream. We would thus argue that the possibility to undertake a contemporary critique of the ‘Intercultural Learning’ as we have experienced in the last two decades in Europe remains necessary in order to preserve intact our capacity for hope and dream.




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## INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Intercultural dialogue has progressively emerged as the concept that seeks to embrace the processes associated with the coexistence of and communication between different peoples and cultures in a way that respects the needs for social cohesion and for respect of the diversity of identities and pluralities of belonging.

The notion of intercultural dialogue used by the Council of Europe for its White Paper is particularly useful for intercultural learning in



that it comprises an “open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage” that should lead to the understanding of different views of the world.

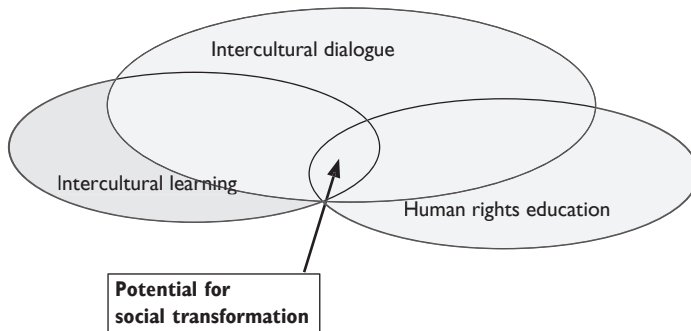
Making intercultural dialogue one of its core missions nowadays, the Council of Europe gives it a prominent role and acknowledges the need for consistent structures and policies for that exchange to occur. This mainstreaming of intercultural dialogue is also an admission of the coming of age of intercultural matters, too often left to the sole hobby and dedication of curious educational experts and idealists.

Intercultural dialogue, and the political emphasis placed upon it, is even more open to some of the critiques made of intercultural learning, namely the ones elaborated by Gavan Titley (2005). Chief among these is the reification of culture and the implicit culturalisation of social matters. How can we resolve the equation that culture encompasses virtually all human activity and yet it cannot be used as the sole criterion for interpreting the quality of human interaction? How can we deal with the fact that migrants and minority groups are not only cultural actors but also social actors? As we will see below, the questions of definition of the terms and language of the dialogue, and of the subsequent power relation, are especially relevant for intercultural dialogue to be genuine and purposeful.

The values underpinning intercultural dialogue, as outlined by the White Paper, are, nevertheless, fundamentally the same as those immanent to intercultural learning. The relationship between intercultural dialogue and intercultural learning can probably be developed as between wider political objectives and frameworks of intercultural relations (intercultural dialogue) and the social educational and didactical means for it (intercultural learning). This has the disadvantage of ignoring that intercultural learning can be a political and social agenda as well and that human rights education has similar educational objectives, although a different focus, and that human rights are necessarily part of the framework of intercultural dialogue.

One could schematise the relationships in this way (see next page):

The extent to which this scheme is complete and useful is not the most important point of this paper. What really matters is the need and our ability to problematise intercultural learning in a contemporary context of which intercultural dialogue is used as a remedy for the “clashes of civilizations”, a spiritual identity/mission of Europe or the resurgences of cultural domination. It is thus necessary not only to understand the



trap of simplistic analysis but also to realise that mainstream discourse is only the most visible part of the iceberg.

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## A NEW IMPETUS FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

In this sense we would like to propose some of the topics that have to be present in this critique in order to conceptualise an innovative twenty-first century ‘Intercultural Learning’ in Europe. The following proposals are still work in progress but aim to motivate people, trainers, educators and other actors to build up multiple re-significations and new re-appropriations of the potentialities of ‘Intercultural Learning’ in order to change minds, social relations, historical relations and educational approaches.

### Dealing with historical injustice

First of all we must admit that ‘Intercultural Learning’ has often forgotten to deal properly with the historic injustice imposed by European colonialisms and the consequences that they have had in the collective meanings of the world. In line with Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Santos, 2004), and Enrique Dussel (1985), we share the idea that colonialism as a formal political system is probably finished, but that it maintains a central role in the social imagination as a system that legitimised roles and relationships of dominators and dominated, citizens and subjects, hegemonomies and subalterns, based on cultural differentialism, racism, religion, and role in human history. The issue is obviously complex, but can be exemplified by the history of power relations between communities (majorities/minorities). Too often we assist in the re-emergency of these

long lasting history (at least five centuries), in the subjectivities and in social relations of the ex-colonised and ex-colonisers inside Europe. We argue that we can identify several and strong signs of this *coloniality*<sup>13</sup> as the rise of nationalisms, racial purity obsessions, the repetitive claim of Christian European identity, and the attempts to legitimise colonialism by stressing its positive role.

Having said that, we need, from now on, to include in the ‘Intercultural Learning’ a debate and an educational approach, not only on a contemporary and micro analysis concerning power relations between individuals, but also a macro and historical approach that takes into account more effectively historical injustices, inviting a better understanding of other perspectives of history and, consequently, of the world today. Mutual and responsive dialogue implies that we are willing and able to re-make and update our *archaeology of knowledge*. If we look carefully at our ‘common’ history, it is evident that it is full of violence, domination and segregation. Another consequence of this question is that history is only apparently common because the collective memories are deeply divergent about what we call ‘historical facts’. For example, the memory and the associated knowledge of a Serbian, a Bosnian, a Croat or a Kosovo Albanian about the recent wars in the Balkans are probably contradictory. The same happens concerning the history of colonialism and the inherent violence between an Angolan and a Portuguese, a Frenchman and an Algerian, and a Zimbabwean and a British person. Role distance as an ability and a competence for practitioners of intercultural learning gets its full meaning in these encounters, but it is clearly insufficient.

## **Breaking the political silences**

Secondly, we should complement the concept of ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ with another, ‘political silences’, to give more density to our analysis. This can be done if we turn political what is normally interpreted as methodological. For example, it is not neutral or a mere question of form/working method when we work on Interculturality and Intercultural Learning, to discuss and to problematise (or not to discuss nor problematise) the following issues:

- ♦ Who is involved in the culture encounters?
- ♦ Who defines it as culturally relevant or relevant for dialogue?
- ♦ In what language(s) does the process go on?
- ♦ What are the un-discussed *topoi*, because we assume to be common what is probably divergent and a cause of dissent – such as the notion

of emancipation, human rights, women's rights, secularism, sexual identity, racism, amongst others?

- ♦ Who sets the themes of the culture dialogue?
- ♦ To whom are they really important?
- ♦ Who has the power to start and to end the dialogue?
- ♦ Who sets the agenda, the place, and the time of the encounter?

The answers to these questions need to be found together, amongst the participants in any intercultural encounter, and this is a political issue, which has often been silenced or, at best, remains implicit. What we propose is to puzzle up the 'tolerance of ambiguity' with a much more demanding concept of what is relevant in the political sphere, today.

None of this is likely to make the task of thinking, or practising intercultural learning any easier. It requires conceiving and valuing time in another way. Deep changes need time, strong efforts, hard work, resilience, perseverance and patience. All these values seem to be out of fashion. But if we do not find any stronger answers, we cannot face the possibility of constructing another social and political paradigm which does not end up in another set of certitudes and values and, in doing so, effectively annihilates the emancipatory role of learning. We do need to educate to an interculturality that empowers people to fundamental serenity in order to deal with transition, openness, diffusion, uncertainty, polycentrism, and poly-rationalism, which configure another way of knowing, thinking and keeping in touch with our Europe inside our World.

## **Are we able to do it ourselves?**

As Peter Lauritzen wrote, Intercultural Learning is discovery and transgression, change and revision, insecurity and uncertainty, openness and curiosity - and perseverance, Jean-Marie Bergeret would have added.

How able are we to do it ourselves? A continued critique and reflection about it is a crucial pre-condition.

## **Footnotes**

- 1 Sven Lindqvist, 'Utrota varenda jävel', traduction française, *Le Serpent à Plumes* / Editions du Rocher, 1998 ("Exterminez tous ces brutes!").
- 2 Paulo Freire is one of the most known Brazilian thinkers and pedagogues. During the military dictatorship in his country he was exiled for many years in Europe, mainly in Switzerland, where he developed an important part of his thinking on education as a political act or, as he called, 'a citizen education'. See, amongst

- others books, 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed' and 'The Pedagogy of Hope'.
- 3 We follow Boaventura de Sousa Santos when he alerts us that globalisation is a very complex phenomenon and does not consist only of a neo-liberal, financial and capitalist transnationalisation. He says that "in the field of transnational social and culture practices the anti-hegemonic transformation consists of the construction of an emancipatory multiculturalism, or, in other words, the democratic construction of reciprocal rules of recognition between distinct identities and cultures. (Santos, 2002: 30)
  - 4 It can be argued to what extent the Eastern and Central European societies living under dictatorships were part of the same movement. Despite the seemingly opposite political perspectives between youth movements in the East and the West in those times, it can also be argued that they were all genuinely liberation movements that represented a breakaway from the conformism or resignation of older generations.
  - 5 It is important at this point to make a reference to the set of new Training Courses that emerged in the Youth Directorate after the first editions of LTTC.
  - 6 Youth organizations and their experiences played an important role in defining and validating intercultural learning, notably the organizations specifically involved in individual and group youth exchanges and those involved in international voluntary service activities (such as workcamps and long-term voluntary service exchanges). The role of the authors mentioned and the institutions associated with their work was nevertheless essential in translating the diversity of educational and organisational practices that is typical of youth organisations into mainstreamed institutionalised youth policy objectives at the service of the project called "Europe".
  - 7 See also "Community Modules for Youth worker Training".
  - 8 It is not the aim of this article to discuss the concept of culture. Being aware of the complexity and the enormous theoretical and empirical debate going on, we use the term 'culture' in this reflection meaning that set of shared characteristics that gives to a person the sense of belonging to a certain community.
  - 9 By heuristic we mean using a method that encourages learners to discover solutions by and for themselves.
  - 10 See *Orientalism* by Edward Said.
  - 11 This concept *starts from the idea that all cultures are incomplete and can, therefore, be enriched by dialogue and confrontation with other cultures* (Santos, 2004: 40). This means refusing a monolithic thought but, instead a pluri-topical – diatopical capacity of reasoning and interpreting the reality.
  - 12 Brazilian sociologist whose cultural background combines Polish/European and Brazilian/South-American experiences. See, among other sources, [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br); [www.ibase.br](http://www.ibase.br).
  - 13 See, among others, the works of Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano or Walter Dignolo where they explore the idea of the remaining understated elements of colonialism as power relations, in social realm and subjectivities after the political colonial cycle, as such, was over.

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# WG I

## The Role and Function of Intercultural Learning

Facilitator IRIS BAWIDAMANN

Rapporteur MOHAMMED DHALECH

### General

How can formal and non-formal education with different stakeholders at government to local (municipality) level be linked? How can young people be motivated, and engaged in Intercultural learning (ICL)? What are the specific features of work with young people? What is youth work in different areas of Europe and outside? What is the /is there a role and function of ICL in youth work? What is the role of stakeholders?

### Priorities of youth work

In youth work driven and controlled by states, funding may be directed towards priorities of the state.

Evaluation of ICL. It cannot be counted numerically: it is qualitative rather than quantitative.

There is a greater need for ICL now than before: the culture of fear, global issues, and bigger challenges need to be addressed.

#### *Action*

- ♦ Research does and should play a role in influencing ICL at policy, academic and other levels.
- ♦ Enable practice to inform policy.
- ♦ Translate existing material and make it accessible in plain language.
- ♦ Follow up initiatives need to be funded.
- ♦ Focus/prioritise ICL at a local level/context.
- ♦ Reinvest at a European level in ICL.
- ♦ Provide training opportunities at a local and national level for youth workers.
- ♦ ICL should be linked to youth policy.
- ♦ Bridge the gap between CoE and EU, through funding of EU funded projects at a national and local level. There is a need for cooperation and collaboration between partners on ICL.

## **Different contexts**

The role of ICL is different for different areas – it needs to be relative and set in a context.

Is ICL directly linked to immigration into countries?

ICL in rural areas – and the impact of migration?

ICL in reality back home, away from the international/European environment where you experience ICL.

ICL is used as and based on nationality – what about other cultures (gender, sub, sexuality, poverty, and rural/urban)? ICL is perceived narrowly around nationality – this is ICL at a practical grass roots level.

### *Action*

- ♦ History – looking at the relationship of history and ICL
- ♦ Train youth workers to facilitate and support activities from international to local level
- ♦ LT activities need to be supported at a local level in ICL
- ♦ Explore the concept and awareness of culture in ICL and look at it in a wider context – beyond nationality. Translate this in to practical action.

## **Local communities in a global context**

Is there a concept of community amongst young people in Europe?

What does community mean to young people?

Where do young people meet today? In school, in the streets, in extra-curricular activities? Communities centred around class and social mobility, etc.

Globalisation – and the impact on ICL?

Communication systems across the world. Small villages are now connected with the world – is this ICL?

### *Action*

- ♦ Encourage youth exchange at a local, regional, national and international and global level
- ♦ Parents, teachers and policy makers at local and national level need to understand ICL
- ♦ ICL needs to be introduced in formal education
- ♦ Use internet platforms

## **Framework**

Should there be a framework? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a framework?

In which framework should ICL be set?

Should it be guided by the principal of HR Education?



Will a framework allow for differing needs, flexibility and realities across Europe and beyond?

A set of guiding principles can inform ICL and allow for the flexibility required across Europe.

ICL is a process not an end result - does it, or can it have outcomes?

Life-long learning – how can ICL contribute?

Should ICL take place alongside other education – around value based education?

#### *Action*

- ♦ Roundtable/discussions at local, national and international levels to exchange/share experiences and concepts.
- ♦ Guiding principles to inform ICL – to provide flexibility to accommodate national context and realities.

### **Role of the youth worker/educator – in ICL**

ICL should promote critical thinking and lead to action, not just be about the process but practical action.

Competencies of teachers and youth worker need to be addressed so that they address ICL with students, trainees and young people.

From international to local level – the need for political motivation to facilitate work around ICL at all levels, particularly locally and nationally.

#### *Actions*

- ♦ Train youth workers and teachers.
- ♦ Create space inside formal education to facilitate discussion and make links between formal and non-formal spheres.

### **Evaluation of the seminar**

Good to explore and understand the issues.

Challenging and reflective but not enough time to discuss the issues.

First experience of working in an international context – need to generate more ideas.

We started from a premise that ICL has a role. There was not enough time go into detail and cover all the issues.

# WG 2

## **Intercultural Learning, Intercultural Education, Intercultural Dialogue**

Facilitator NADINA LYAMOURI-BAJJA

Rapporteur ANDREAS KARSTEN

### **Investigating three terms**

From multicultural co-existence to intercultural co-operation through intercultural learning, education and dialogue?

The group began the exchange by exploring the relationship between the three terms intercultural learning, intercultural dialogue and intercultural education. Most participants viewed intercultural exchanges and encounters as a first step of intercultural learning, and considered intercultural dialogue an advanced quality of life in today's multicultural societies and a result of intercultural learning. It was agreed, however, that intercultural learning must be rooted in real-life situations: without such a local context, it becomes meaningless and arbitrary. Participants also noted the limits of intercultural processes – be it learning, education or dialogue – in that none of them can resolve systematic dysfunctions of societies, such as political or economical discrimination and social exclusion.

### **Approaches to ICL, education and dialogue**

The discussion continued with an exchange of approaches to intercultural learning, education and dialogue. Notable reflections included:

- ♦ the danger of intercultural learning to support the culturalisation of people – the perception of individuals as tokens of their culture, and the limitation of individuals to their culture;
- ♦ the need for continuous offers for intercultural learning: awareness-raising and education have to be ongoing;
- ♦ the recurrent trap of being overambitious, and trying to solve fundamental structural problems with intercultural learning;
- ♦ the risk of intercultural learning becoming an elitist concept, only accessible for the young, mobile, wealthy Erasmus generation;
- ♦ the limits of multiplying intercultural learning – it appears that intercultural encounters have to be experienced personally and directly;

- ♦ the complexity of intercultural learning processes – addressing rationality vs. emotionality, self-perceptions vs. perceptions;
- ♦ the importance of intercultural learning to be considered as a process of life-long and life-wide learning;
- ♦ the danger of intercultural dialogue becoming a dialogue about cultures rather than a dialogue between cultures; and
- ♦ the necessity of educators to be aware of and able to deal with the historical contexts, political relevance and socio-cultural implications of intercultural learning and dialogue and the different concepts connected to these terms.

### **Emerging questions**

In the ongoing exchange about intercultural education, dialogue and learning, the group noted down a couple of questions emerging from the discourse, namely:

- ♦ Do you need to break taboos in intercultural education?
- ♦ Can intercultural learning be inter-generational? How?
- ♦ What comes first, what is last? What is a tool, what is the aim?
- ♦ Can intercultural learning exist without addressing human rights?
- ♦ How can intercultural education be political without becoming an alibi?
- ♦ How can international youth work be grounded in real-life local contexts?
- ♦ How can multiple frameworks be addressed, from local to global?
- ♦ How much diversity can intercultural learning accept? Is there a limit?
- ♦ How do you overcome group or clique pressure through intercultural learning?
- ♦ How can individualisations of systemic problems be avoided – such as the claim that racism and discrimination merely stem from the ignorance of citizens?
- ♦ How much ambiguity can intercultural learning tolerate in our times?
- ♦ Does intercultural learning have to be organised? Is there an informal variant?
- ♦ Is intercultural dialogue a tool for change – or a tool for socialising and being nice?
- ♦ Can intercultural learning reach anything at all in hostile environments?

# WG 3

## Re-constructing Intercultural Learning

Facilitator ANNETTE SCHNEIDER

Rapporteur BASTIAN KÜNTZEL

### **Tolerance of ambiguity ...**

Just respect without understanding, understanding the meaningfulness to others, without sharing it. Understanding other rationalities. Living with insecurity. Living with the fact that something doesn't fit into our understanding of reality. The way one sees the Other is an interpretation that does not necessarily fit the reality. Tolerance of ambiguity is contra-assimilation. It's an intercultural competence that has been discussed for quite a long time and is quite important. Modern societies demand tolerance of ambiguity, just simply because of how life works (jobs, etc.) It's a life skill. It's a disposition. A personal skill. The politics of this – culture and cultural conflict are an area of conflict, where states have some kind of control. Debates on the end of tolerance take place in countries that have little influence on the economy, for example. There is quite a lot of political capital to be taken out of this. Tolerance of ambiguity in cultural terms is politically un-hip. But isn't too much tolerance to ambiguity a road to indifference? You don't have to tolerate everything! It depends on the situation, where you tolerate what. It's a dilemma!

From Albania people pointed out that the three religious groups live peacefully together. This is because they never mentioned 'tolerance'. They were not tolerating, simply respecting each other. Tolerance means that you are different and you think that you're right, and the other is wrong, and that is a basis of conflict.

### **Linking this to the inadequacies**

Not everything is comprehensible and sometimes trying to comprehend means violating. ICL rarely looks at the everyday life of people. Urban life has always been ambiguous. People just get on with things. ICL is blind to political rhetoric. Tolerance means also 'this is us and this is how much we can tolerate'. Tolerance means also narcissism.

The conceptual inadequacy also shows that tolerance of ambiguity should be referred to outside the cultural frame. Political or economical frames might be more adequate. Speaking of tolerance creates conflicts that clearly reflect the political inadequacy that Gavan talked about. There can always be a political interest of promoting tolerance to steer conflict, a hidden usage of ICL to promote tolerance to steer a divide. Different concepts are needed – we are far away from universal concepts – they might even be counter-productive. We may have to use flexible frames. It has to be adapted to different realities. We're looking for a diverse understanding of ICL. Conceptually it is possible to think in flexible forms – it might be politically difficult within this institution?

We keep looking for a definition of ICL, even though we know it doesn't exist. We need to live with the ambiguity that there is not one definition. It's not about methods. It depends too much on how, when, and where you use them. But what does this mean for the institutional practise? What do we ask from people who apply for grants? What do we expect from them?

We need more issue-based work in seminars. Work in relation to things going on around and then develop the framework in the seminar: How do you know what you know? There are too many technicians in ICL who know how to run an activity. But they don't know how to relate that to different realities. There is an over simplification.

### **ICL – Reconstruction**

The dialogue between research – between youth workers and policy makers - needs to improve. What about hierarchies? They also exist within the CoE. There is a gap between youth workers and researchers. How do we translate papers to practical work?

Ways out of inadequacy – that's how we need to reconstruct. Consequences of the new thinking about it for CoE practise. We need some criteria. And we must not avoid the question of values – where do we want to go with ICL? We need to contextualise, also historically. Deculturalise ICL (but then, what would you call it?). Voice the complexity of narratives and silences. Social justice has to be touched on. Harmony doesn't mean absence of conflict.

Anti-racism has to be anti-racism again. It has been colonised by intercultural learning. Keep things separate but together as well. This is part of reconstructing – keeping things what they are and are not.

We need to re-conceptualise trainers as political educators. People need to know more about the world, and they need the awareness on

how you see it. Where is your starting point? Trainers also need to know themselves – what do they want to achieve? It also has to come back to the question of power and privilege. ICL needs to happen where difference justifies discrimination.

We need to look at different spheres of work for ICL. One of them is youth exchange. This is easy to do. There is much more to do when it comes to differences in power for example, or different political views. But this is where conflict is. It's not about harmony anymore then.

It is not in the values, but in the implementation of them, which is ideology: this is where people disagree.

How will this discussion leave this circle? What will happen with the report of the Seminar? The CoE seems to be open to change something. But this seminar is just a starting point. So what's the next step? Keeping the discussion alive? Could there be a practical outcome of the report? Identifying axes of de-construction?

What could be a criterion for something to be a good ICL activity?

How can the Directorate of Youth and Sport ensure the quality of the trainers to be able to carry out ICL in an adequate way?

Simplification – is there any way? It's not the time for simplifying right now.

# WG 4

## Intercultural learning in European Training Activities

Facilitator: YAEL OHANA

Rapporteur: RUXANDRA PANDEA

### The competences of trainers and educators

Following the discussion on how to re-define and re-shape intercultural learning, in our working group we focused on how intercultural learning is and should be present in European training activities.

This report does not pay respect to chronological order in our discussion but to conclusions and their logic. Our discussion focused mainly on the competences of trainers and educators for intercultural learning.

1. Which are the competences for intercultural learning?
2. How can we make trainers 'literate'?
3. How can we make concepts accessible?

The group agreed on intercultural learning as being a transversal educational approach of European training courses that aims to:

- ♦ Create and develop critical literacy of young people. Critical literacy will support young people in exploring different theories, concepts, approaches and practices, and their implication at micro and macro level of communities and individual lives, based on their understanding to take their own position. Critical literacy will make it possible to shift, revise and question one's values and stances.
- ♦ Support and promote values of European cooperation, enable reflection and create action in support of these values.
- ♦ Empower active and equal participation in the life of the community for all its members.

We defined European training courses as being those courses:

- ♦ Promoting the values of European cooperation (Human Rights, democracy, rule of law, etc.);
- ♦ Taking place in Europe and/or with European participants;
- ♦ Within the framework of European programmes and institutions.

## **I. Competences for intercultural learning**

A competence is the combination and result of knowledge, skills and attitudes of a trainer in a specific area or domain.

We did not focus on general training competences inherent for the job, but rather on what is relevant in relation to intercultural learning, structuring the discussion on the three components of competence.

### *Knowledge*

Based on our experiences in training, it is important that we contextualize each experience. This implies that trainers are active long-life learners who would give the relevant importance to the preparation of a training activity.

It is important to contextualize the training experience, thus implying that any training requires specific preparation and knowledge. A general knowledge of current political and social discussions, debates, and events at a European level is minimal.

Youth work is nothing less than another kind of work. Therefore it requires from those doing it as much professionalism as in other fields: being up-to-date with the latest discussions in academic fields, such as theories and concepts in what concerns our daily practice, along with actively reflecting on what that implies for our work.

In order to ensure quality in educational programs it is important to reflect on what is embedded within specific activities: a certain vision of cultures, or a specific action that might have different meanings to participants and in different contexts.

### *Skills & Attitudes*

- ♦ Empathy;
- ♦ Assessment of the nature of intercultural dimension of the target group (i.e. intercultural dimension of a group might mean different nationalities, different ethnicities or different residence places such as urban or rural, just to mention a few possibilities);
- ♦ From the experiences of the members in the working group to keep an honest attitude towards oneself as well as trainees in respect of one's own view of the world, cultural limitations, limits of his/her 'neutrality' and tolerance. That involves transparency over aims and objectives, expression of one's views over issues under discussion, enforcing an attitude that allows one to be consistent with one's own values, without denying the other perspective. Trainers are in a power position no matter how non-formal the setting and the approach is, and therefore they have to



be aware of the danger of ‘indoctrination’ they might practice without intention. Critical analysis is a key competence of the trainer and one important element of training courses to target young people.

The key competences in intercultural learning for a trainer would still be tolerance of ambiguity and distance to social roles. While it is important to be able to deal with a variety of perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, it is also important to be able to acknowledge that tolerance has its limits.

## **2. How can trainers be made literate?**

Literacy for trainers is meant to support them in performing their job efficiently. The trend of being ‘anti-theory’ must be rejected and the potential cooperation between researchers and practitioners should be enforced. Training courses should be less technical and tool-oriented, and should aim to create critical thinkers. The competence of trainers to self-assess their learning needs and design self-learning development plans must become an element in the training of trainers.

It is important to define European standards in terms of a list of necessary competences and recognition of one’s status as trainer in x/y subject, and the transfer and recognition of such a standard at a national level is a key focus.

Plenary discussion questioned who can assess trainers, and how, and what implies such a measure in non-formal education. Positive aspects of non-formal education are freedom of hierarchies, strict professional performance indicators and examinations, and possibilities to integrate and evolve. It does not mean that non-formal education is lacking standards, but it implies a different manner in assessing and rewarding quality. If recognition is to be searched we need to be able to make standards of quality visible and understandable.

Today we can see a big offer of training in the youth field which is not necessarily well orientated, which led us to conclude that an emphasis on better needs assessment at a European and local level is needed. Project initiators need further training in social analysis, which seems to be employed inefficiently in designing initiatives.

## **3. ‘Translations’ of concepts**

If we aim for critical thinking and literacy, we need to make the link between concept and practice. Consequently, trainers must aid the process of translation of what, at times, could be an ‘academic’ discourse to a daily practice in society.

# WG 5

## Bringing Research and Actions Together

Facilitator MARIA KOUTATZI

Reporter RUZANNA IVANYAN

### Focus

The group had a short brainstorming session about possible elements to discuss. The main issues that came up were:

- ♦ Who needs research? Who understands and uses research?
- ♦ Should action based on research / new discourse be updated?
- ♦ How to feed (ask for) practice results that may ask for further research and a renewal /update of theory?
- ♦ Evaluation system?
- ♦ One place for relevant research?
- ♦ Socio-economic political analysis of situations?
- ♦ Where do research and action meet? Are they in equal positions? Who initiates these meetings?
- ♦ Action research.
- ♦ Quality of researches: very low quality of youth work and low quality of youth research.

Different types of research were identified: academic research, policy research, practitioner's assessment, and project evaluation. Sometimes practitioners do research, but they do not call it research.

Other divisions of researches could be on issues, topics, or content; on methodology or on impact.

Who needs the research? This is a field in need of investigation. The CoE needs an impact evaluation, and methods applied in ICL need revising. A knowledge centre is a good idea for a place where opinions can meet, but keeping it up-to-date requires someone taking care of it.

What makes research European? European research is not only about what we research but also who does it. So far research on ICL has been done from specific cultural, gender, or regional perspectives which narrow them considerably. We need enlargement.

### **Where does research and action meet?**

Are they in equal positions? Who initiates these meetings? Should they meet? Yes. Research will be very abstract if not connected with practice. Should they be on an equal basis? Both should be given equal attention. We have countries where practitioners lead the programmes, and in other contexts, where researchers are leading. They have different roles, which is also important for funding. The political issue should not be underestimated, and this power issue is different in different countries.

Sometimes the research and practice meet in one person when s/he combines different roles.

Research and practice can meet as well while evaluating the impact of the activities on the society.

### **Tools for evaluation (research tools)**

There are almost no tools measuring the impact of ICL – just the pre-course and post-course questionnaires. IDI exists but costs a lot: maybe something similar could be produced. There could be pilot applications, and pilot research. At the same time, a number of sociological tools exist but they are not used. This is another meeting point for practice and theory.

One of the solutions could be to ask the expert group to work through all the methods and develop some tools for evaluating the impacts.

### **Role of Council of Europe**

- ♦ The CoE is almost invisible in Europe.
- ♦ Human rights: this is what makes the CoE different from other institutions.
- ♦ The long-term evaluation of the impact of CoE activities in the field of ICL is needed.

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# PROGRAMME

Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work: which ways forward?

*European Youth Centre Budapest 28-29 November 2007*

A seminar about the role of intercultural learning theory and practice in European youth work and its role in the youth policy and programme of the Council of Europe

## **Wednesday, 28 November**

- 09:30 Opening of the seminar by *Antje Rothemund*,  
Executive Director of the European Youth Centre Budapest
- 09:40 Introduction to the seminar's framework, aims, objectives  
and programme, by *Rui Gomes*, Head of Education and  
Training Unit, Directorate of Youth and Sport
- 10:05 Getting to know each other and initial exchange of ideas on  
intercultural learning and on expectations about the seminar
- 10:45 Break
- 11:15 The role of Intercultural Learning in Youth Work today,  
lecture by Dr. *Hendrik Otten*, Institut für angewandte  
Kommunikationsforschung in der Außerschulischen Bildung  
(IKAB)
- 12:00 Comments and discussion on the input
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Intercultural Learning: Plastic, Political and Contingent?  
lecture by Dr. *Gavan Titley*, National University of Ireland
- 15:15 Comments and discussion on the input
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Discussion continued, on the basis of short presentations
- 18:00 Preliminary conclusions and identification of issues to deepen
- 19:00 Dinner

### **Thursday, 29 November**

- 09:30 Summary of the previous day
- 10:00 Working Groups, on:
  - 1 The role and function of intercultural learning
  - 2 Intercultural learning, intercultural education and intercultural dialogue
  - 3 Re-constructing intercultural learning
  - 4 Intercultural learning in European training activities
  - 5 Bringing research and actions together
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Working Groups continued
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Conclusion of the work in groups
- 15:00 Presentations of the Working Groups' conclusions
- 16:30 Break
- 17:00 Conclusions by *Ingrid Ramberg*, the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka, General rapporteur
- 17:30 Evaluation
- 18:00 Closing of the seminar





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Intercultural learning has been at the heart of the activities of the youth sector of the Council of Europe since its creation in 1972, notably those held at the European Youth Centres of Strasbourg and Budapest. There are many definitions of intercultural learning, but there is also a shared understanding that intercultural learning is essential in order to be able to function and perform in our multicultural societies and to take part fully in social development. Intercultural dialogue has also been at the centre of the work of the Council of Europe, culminating in the approval of the White Book on Intercultural Dialogue in 2008.

The seminar documented in these pages was organised by the Directorate of Youth and Sport to look at the state of affairs regarding intercultural theory and practice in youth work and its connection with intercultural dialogue. In addition to the comprehensive report of Ingrid Ramberg, the publication includes also two articles that have left their imprint on the role of intercultural learning in non-formal education practices:

- A revised version of the 'Ten theses on Intercultural learning, youth encounters and youth work', by Dr. Hendrik Otten
- 'Plastic, Political and Contingent' by Dr Gavan Titley.

Altogether, the report is a substantial collection of the main discourses on intercultural learning in youth work, and the many inevitable questions that come with it.

The Council of Europe has 47 member states, covering virtually the entire continent of Europe. It seeks to develop common democratic and legal principles based on the European Convention of Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals.

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