

# RFCDC – LEARNING ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Free to speak –  
constructive discussion about Covid-19



Target group:  
**Learners in  
upper primary and  
secondary schools**

**ADDRESSING  
CONTROVERSIAL  
ISSUES**



# ADDRESSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

## Free to speak – constructive discussion about Covid-19

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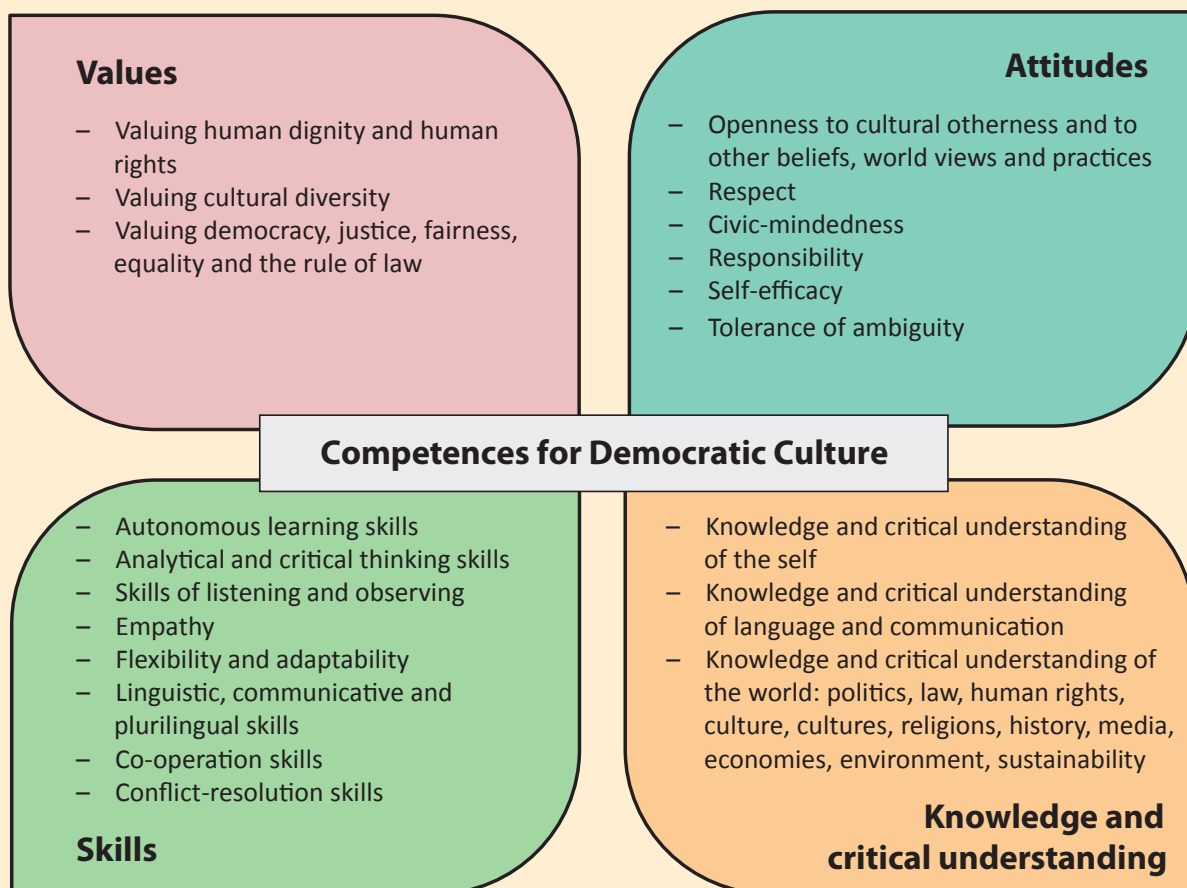
### RATIONALE

— Most learners have been in the lockdown situation at their homes during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to create safe opportunities for them to express and share their feelings and memories

about that period. It is equally important to listen to other people's experiences and understand that, in some cases, the isolation period was very difficult for various reasons.



## THE RFCDC COMPETENCES



## COMPETENCES PROMOTED BY THE ACTIVITY

— Tolerance of ambiguity; Skills of listening and observing; Co-operation skills; Empathy.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

— Completing this activity will help learners to:

- ▶ Engage well with other people who have a variety of different points of view
- ▶ Seek out discussions with people whose ideas and values are different from their own
- ▶ Listen carefully to differing opinions
- ▶ Share their own ideas and resources with others
- ▶ Show appreciation of and consideration for other group members
- ▶ Understand their friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective
- ▶ Describe feelings identified by other people



## DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

1. The session takes 60-75 minutes. The groups should have a maximum of 25 participants. A group of 12-15 learners is ideal.
2. The facilitator organises a calm and safe place for the discussion. The chairs should be in a circle, so that everybody can see each other. It is also possible to do the exercise online (for special instructions, see the Timeout project website).
3. The facilitator begins by explaining the rules of constructive discussion. Pupils should:
  - ▶ LISTEN to others and not interrupt the speaker.
  - ▶ RELATE their comments to what others have said.
  - ▶ TELL about their own experiences.
  - ▶ RESPECT others and the confidentiality of the discussion.
4. The facilitator reads out the first part of the role game story (which should contain characters who hold different views on a sensitive or controversial issue about which they have strong feelings). Then the floor is given to all the learners. The facilitator points out that everybody has an opportunity to express themselves, and the facilitator encourages everybody to express their own ideas and experiences.
5. After the first part, the facilitator reads the second part of the story, and opens the discussion again, and so on.
6. At any time, the facilitator can request the learners have smaller group discussion to find common views (pair discussions, small group discussions etc.) which will then be presented to others.
7. At the end of the session, the facilitator wraps up the discussion and asks everyone to write down on a post-it note the most important things they remember about the discussion. The facilitator shares the anonymous answers with the rest of the group.

### **An example role game story**

In spring 2020, all the world was surprised by the Covid-19 virus.

M/S Victory cruise ship goes from one tourist attraction to another. The passengers are happy tourists of all ages from many countries. There are families with young children, a group of elderly scientists having an important science conference, some politicians, and a very famous pop-band (with over 8 million Instagram followers) entertaining the passengers.

One morning there is a long queue in front of the cabin of the ship doctor. Many of the passengers have had similar symptoms. The doctor quickly analyses the situation and declares that the Covid-19 virus has infected many of the passengers. He cannot do anything else than to declare 14 days of quarantine for all passengers and ask for medical help.

## MATERIALS OR RESOURCES REQUIRED

- ▶ A role game story (or any other relevant text)
- ▶ A constructive dialogue method adapted from the Finnish Timeout project, which is a new method for generating constructive discussions. For constructive discussion tools and conversation cards from the Timeout project for use by the facilitator, see:
  - <https://www.timeoutdialogue.fi/whats-timeout-about/>
- ▶ A facilitator who takes care of the constructiveness of the discussion (teacher, school psychologist, social worker, or educator)



The passengers feel that they are prisoners in the ferry. The cabins are not very big, and people are worried about their health and about the long and boring quarantine period. How to spend 14 days in these conditions? Especially families with children are very preoccupied.

**First discussion round: Imagine that you are a passenger in that ship. What would you feel and do in a similar situation? Do you have personal experiences to share from the Covid-19 period?**

There are more and more cases coming up. In fact, nearly all the passengers have some symptoms. They are very worried. What would happen to them? Rumours start to circulate. Some passengers are supposed to have special rights, better food, and other advantages. Questions are raised: who is the origin of the disease? Passengers start to blame each other, and the atmosphere becomes toxic. Especially one family with two school aged children – coming from a country where Covid-19 is known to be a problem – is a target of accusations.

**Second discussion round: What is your personal view of the situation. How would you behave in a similar situation? What should you/the captain do in order to improve the atmosphere?**

Finally, there is a piece of good news. A rescue helicopter could take a limited number of passengers to the mainland and hospital. The passengers start to dispute how to choose the lucky ones.

There is a new problem. How to choose the 10 lucky ones to be rescued in the first place? Young children, elderly scientists and other risk group persons, the members of the famous pop-band, important politicians, or the most affected patients?

**Third round of discussion: What would you propose and why?**

The time passes slowly. Luckily all the passengers recover and after two weeks all the passengers are given permission to leave the ferry.

People are pleased but there is also a bit of a bittersweet feeling in the air. During the quarantine, many new friendships were made, and passengers had formed a strange attachment to each other and to the special situation, which they would remember for the rest of their lives. Many things in the world outside the ferry are still unclear.

**Fourth round of discussion: What positive memories do you have of the Covid-19 period? What new things did you learn during the isolation period?**

## REFLECTION ON THE ACTIVITY AND THE LEARNING OUTCOMES THAT HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED

It is important that in the end of the session the facilitator asks questions about the dialogue process. The following questions may be asked: How did the learners feel about the dialogue? Was it easy to express their views? Was the discussion constructive? Did their understanding of the topic increase? Should there be similar types of discussions about other sensitive or controversial topics? Which ones?

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