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## **Cross-Cultural Learning and Citizenship**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explains the premises underlying the workshop facilitated by the authors at the 9<sup>th</sup> European CiCe Conference. We first argue why, for both Portugal and Germany, citizenship education has to include a type of intercultural training. We explain the competences that are needed to manage culturally ambiguous situations, and how these competences can be acquired or learnt. In the main part of the paper, we present examples of training units (in comprehension, cultural awareness and coping with diversity) which can be practiced by participants. We evaluate these and suggest how cross-cultural training can be implemented in domestic systems of citizenship education.*

### **Introduction**

This paper explains the premises underlying the workshop facilitated by the authors at the 9<sup>th</sup> European CiCe Conference. The workshop evolved around the following contents: concept definition (culture and cultural shock, intercultural learning, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural citizenship); dimensions of intercultural learning (knowledge, communication skills, values and attitudes); teaching and learning about culture and cultural communication; connections between intercultural learning and active citizenship.

Multiculturalism and diversity are of critical importance to education, as helping young people to understand multiple perspectives and worldviews is critical to intercultural education and to citizenship education. If students understand that there are many possible ways to view the world and social phenomena and that these belief systems are socially constructed, if they understand that their own view is only one possible one, this will increase their social knowledge and self knowledge, and it helps protect liberty. This view is a basis to appreciate diversity, to engage in and learn from culturally diverse relations, and to establish synergies with others, in order to solve problems in a cooperative and creative way.

Addressing multiple perspectives is essential for educators and young generations in plural schools and communities. Studies show that statistics for underachievement, exclusion, bullying and abandonment are much higher for children of immigrants and minorities present in schools. Often these phenomena signal lack of adaptation and social failure and reveal the depreciation and rejection of immigrants' and minorities' presence and a failure of society and the majority to accept diversity and to move from a ethnocentric paradigm to a ethno relativist perspective regarding citizenship. Educational settings and educators must learn how to cope with the tensions, uncertainty and fragile

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social cohesion in multiethnic groups and cope with interethnic relationships in healthy ways, preventing and fighting manifestations of discrimination, exclusion and prejudice.

A person who relies on a monocultural perspective will view any behaviours, values and lifestyles that differ from his/her cultural norms as deficient or deviant behaviour (cultural racism). This ethnocentric bias serves as a barrier to effective interethnic communication and cross-cultural learning.

Due to multicultural society and global interdependence, citizenship cannot but be inclusive: 'good citizens' are able to communicate and cooperate in situations which are culturally ambiguous, i.e. the actors are acting according to different rules (more or less rigid ones, including exceptions and variations). They might have different values in mind, exercise different rituals, use and understand symbols in different ways, perceive the 'reality' according to different aspects etc.

Citizenship education is providing learners with competences, be it cognitive ones (knowledge), be it skills, be it values and attitudes. With regard to cultural diversity we can distinguish the following cross-cultural competences:

- Learners know that each personality has cultural aspects, situations can be culturally ambiguous;
- Learners are aware of the rules other people apply; they are aware of the fact that they themselves perceive, feel, judge, act according to their own rules which might be different from other people's ones; learners manage to move in a setting which is culturally ambiguous.
- Learners at least accept cultural diversity as a matter of fact; maybe even appreciate cultural diversity as an enriching experience.

As cross-cultural competences are less cognitive than practical and value-bound, citizenship education in this field is less teaching than training. Hence we are highlighting cross-cultural trainings, not without, however, reflecting the presuppositions and hidden messages of those trainings. In this workshop, we figured out which competences are needed in order to manage culturally ambiguous situations and how these competences can be acquired/ learnt. We have done this by offering practical exercises and introducing the main 'schools' of training:

- Exercises which make people sensitive for cultural diversity.
- Training which enables the learners to avoid or to manage critical incidents and finally understand 'the culture' (s)he is in contact with (cultural assimilator).
- Training which enables the learners to recognise and reflect the different types of 'software' which seem to programme people differently (cultural awareness).
- Training which enables people whatever background they come from to start a project jointly, proceed fairly and perform it successfully.

### **Methods in cross-cultural training**

Using active methodologies (e.g., simulation games, and other group dynamic activities, quiz games, questionnaires, case study/critical incidents and discussion) and providing a review of relevant and updated literature on intercultural learning, active citizenship and intercultural citizenship, we aimed at:

- Providing a view on intercultural learning: concept, dimensions, conditions and connections;
- Highlighting the main dimensions of intercultural learning: knowledge, communication skills, attitudes and values (namely sensitivity and appreciation of diversity);
- Relating intercultural (learning-sensitivity-education) with (active-democratic-European) citizenship;
- Presenting and demonstrating active strategies of use in intercultural education;
- Promoting a discussion on how to infuse curriculum and academic practices with an intercultural and international dimension.

Intercultural training designs may be centred in experiential discovery or in didactic expository and they can be culture-specific or culture-general. We are now going to summarise and discriminate two types of activities proposed to the participants during the workshop: critical incidents/case studies (more traditional approach and culture-specific) and simulation/group dynamic games (experiential discovery and culture-general).

#### **a) Intercultural training: the use of critical incidents**

Critical incidents are situations in which we feel that our rules of perception, judgement, and action do not suffice. We do not succeed to manage our 'business', to achieve our goals. Reactions used are:

- We avoid further contacts or refuse communication, as we are not sure how to cope with it;
- We look for neutral places, universal codes etc.;
- We reject our own responsibility and 'delegate' it to the others: they are strange, crazy, ignorant, backward etc.

Hence training with critical incidents provides us with – virtual, simulated – experiences and shows us:

- What we practise every day and deem to be self-understanding is just one way to approach to the world,
- There are different logics according to which people act,
- Encounters with people, most probably with those from other areas, are challenging, but not necessarily uncomfortable.

Training such as the exercises with critical incidents do have particular risks and weaknesses:

They highlight critical incidents, not happy ones – hence the hidden message can be: cross-cultural encounters are risky, tiring.

They neglect all kinds of individualism and pluralism: mainstreams are getting over generalised, cultures appear to be homogenous; it sells, but has no evidence that one state = one culture. The result can be false security (The illusion of knowing how they are alike).

### **b) Intercultural training: simulation games and experiential activities**

Simulation games, role play, dramatisation, problem and conflict solving are all activities based on experiential learning and even if they can be culture-specific, any available activities are culture-general, which means not directed towards learning the specificity of any particular culture, but instead oriented to foster intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence in general. The goal is not to acknowledge the particularities of a certain culture, but instead to foster open-mindedness and the ability to be sensitive to difference, to appreciate it and to learn how to deal with it. These activities can be integrated either in practical training programs or in more fundamental courses. The basis for its success is the fact that students/trainees start with concrete, intense and very often funny social activities, very often designed to make emotions play a role in the development and results achieved.

If we accept that cross-cultural learning implies observation, reflection, discussion, involvement, open-mindedness and self-reward, and if we understand intercultural competence as synonyms to cross-cultural awareness, adaptation and effectiveness, then experiential training designs are favoured against more conventional/expository methods, as they allow to train simultaneously the cognitive, affective and behavioural components of intercultural competencies.

The activity in itself and the discussion arising during debriefing promote reflection upon previously held biased ideas and very often the new inputs are experienced as cognitive discrepancies. In turn, these discrepancies foster a cognitive move towards upper levels of understanding of culture and challenge the tendency to see personal cultural patterns, practices and values as the 'only' correct views, i.e., it promotes ethno relativism.

Paradigm changing and addressing situations, conflicts and problems from another point of view is an excellent basis to promote intercultural sensitivity and competence and having that purpose in mind, simulation games, role play, problem and conflict solving and dilemmas are all interesting activities to start with. These exercises are based on the idea that experience and emotions should be an important part of training. People understand better the relevance and meaning of concepts and propositions if they have the opportunity to live any experience that can be easily taken as a concrete illustration of it, even if this experience is a mere simulation. The concrete experience involves the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions needed to make sense of any idea that collides or challenges previous attitudes, thoughts, ideas or certainties.

These activities usually intend to promote cultural awareness (being able to see ones self in relation with a cultural background), cross-cultural awareness (recognising similarities and differences between cultures) and cross-cultural communication skills (helping an effective communication across cultures, these skills are especially needed for work in international or intercultural teams and cooperation with people from diverse cultural backgrounds).

The activities chosen in our workshop intend to help participants to understand the impacts and representation of 'cultural differences' and to help familiarise them with intercultural activities which have proven useful to promote ethno relativism. We selected activities that simulate the experience of culture shock as a tool to reveal intercultural issues. Such activities force participants to understand how important it is to switch paradigms when immersed in intercultural context or when trying to understand the reasons for the behaviour and truths of people from different cultural backgrounds, who behave, act and acknowledge reality with the support of rules, norms, conventions and values that might differ very much from our own. These kinds of activities are intended to help participants examine their views in a relativistic way and understand that it is one possible way of analysing reality amongst many other possible (and legitimate) ones. Together with theoretical inputs these experiences help participants to go through their own path to cultural competency, in a progressive sense – from ethnocentricity to multiculturalisation, going through the intermediate phases - awareness, understanding, acceptance/respect, appreciation/value and selective adoption.

### **Conclusion**

Any workshop or activity alone should not be concluded before a debriefing period. When debriefing the activities enough time should be allowed for group discussion and reflections, so that the participant may connect their own personal, real intercultural experiences with the experiences lived during the workshop activities. This is a very important moment in intercultural training because experience is not enough to promote learning: people learn from *reflecting* on their experience, not only from experience. Besides, this is the moment when facilitators and participants have the opportunity to discuss concrete applications, either in the education field or in life, of the acquired knowledge and insights.

Also, it is worthwhile as an introductory activity to present new intercultural communication concepts and theories to the participants, because the abstract ideas will be better retained and understood if they are supported in the participant's concrete experience.