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‘Learning step by step’: The youth of today, ‘the multiple society’, the project ‘To-Gather’, and the film ‘It’s hard to become who you are’

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Abstract

Times are a changing and young people are changing too. That’s why education has to make it possible for young people to find an own way in the future. In May 2005 the project ‘To-Gather’ was born during the annual CiCe-Conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The aim was to make a learning arrangement for young people between 3 and 25 years in order to develop an own identity in Europe. Step by step young people should be able to become active and democratic citizens. For that reason several modern learning strategies and didactics were used as well as new insights in philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, economy, pedagogy and aesthetics. The main tool to combine all these elements and to reach young people is music and the film ‘It’s hard to become who you are’.

You are welcome to To-Gatherland, a land that’s not on the map, but where many young people are looking for.

Young people are growing up in a turbulent and ‘multiple society’. ‘At best they are concerned in a responsible fashion with respect towards their personal goals; their family, friends, peers and colleagues; their mission or sense of calling; the institutions with which they are affiliated; and lastly, the wider world’ (Howard Gardner, 2006). The multiple society or network society is a form of society that is increasingly organizing its relationships with and within electronically processed information networks, gradually replacing or complementing the “old” social networks of personal face-to-face communication. A ‘hyperreal’ world has been created with commerce and media inclusive linear, cyclical and chaotic developments. Things are not what they seem to be and the present financial crisis is a ‘good’ example. For young people it’s hard to become who they are, because they don’t really know what’s going on. In the information society appears to be a lack of good information.

This paper is about the youth of today in ‘the multiple society’, learning step by step to find their own way and to become a good and active citizen. The project ‘To-Gather’ and the film ‘It’s hard to become who you are’ are described as tools to become a ‘life-artist’ in relation to the self and the other. Young people learn to make their own choices within the framework of human rights, developing a ‘multiple choice identity’ in order to live your life as a sense-opened, knowledge-based, problem-solving, communicative, creative, cooperative and reflective citizen in Europe who can also relate to Northern Africa and the Middle East. ‘The multiple choice identity’ is a person, who is creating his own identity according to place and time.

This is why we have designed the project 'To-Gather' to learn young people to develop their own identity in and outside of Europe. This is why we designed special learning routes for the age-groups between 3-6 years, 7-11 years, 12-16 years and 17-25 years.

All groups work on the five core themes: Identity, Family and Friends, Good Work (ecological identity), Migration and Mobility, and the Other. The learning routes comprise of seven unique steps and every step is an important phase for the learning process towards active and democratic citizenship in Europe. At To-Gather, we use knowledge from different European perspectives, places and cultural backgrounds. And we believe that it is important to use a broad range of sources of knowledge such as texts, images, paintings and music. That is how we activate new learning-styles, such as multiple intelligences, systems thinking, digital learning, lateral thinking and creative learning. It may seem ambitious, but this is our way to respect young people, the Other and Europe.

A short overview of the project

Since 2005 we have been working with about 750 young people between 3 and 25 years and now in ten European countries: Latvia, Slovenia, Portugal, Denmark, Turkey, Hungary, Slovakia, Belgium, England and the Netherlands. Out of these collaborations emerged a lot of interesting learning material. That means the working material is designed by teachers and young people from different European countries. The theoretical aspect of the programme is based on the work of influential thinkers like Howard Gardner, Fred Korthagen, Peter Sloterdijk, Anthony Giddens, Jeremy Rifkin, David Fromkin and Norman Davies. In addition, we also cooperate with networks such as EMUNI, CiCe, ETEN and the Humanistic League as well as with musicians of bands like Audiofeel, Scanner, VanderLinde, Loreena McKennitt and Sigur ros. Music is essential in 'To-Gather' and we agree with Friedrich Nietzsche : 'Life without music is a mistake'.

Why is the project called To-Gather?

The first reason is to let teachers and young people meet and work/learn together. It's cooperative learning and real life learning in a dynamic way. The second reason is the intercultural dialogue between young people from Europe and outside of Europe (Northern Africa and the Middle East). It is the gathering of the self and the other, thinking out of the box and searching the unknown. The third reason is to gather theories and practical experiences (learning strategies and didactics). A multi-perspectivistic approach is realised by gathering multiple intelligences and multi-disciplines, the multiple choice identity and the multiple society and also the past, the present and the future in the Field of View.

We will guide young people step by step and that is why we have designed a learning route of seven steps through 'the multiple society' and through your learning process. Each step is a phase in this learning process and a step towards democratic citizenship. It's a learning and a living strategy to become a good and balanced person, using the five

minds for the future. These minds are competences and talents that take young people forward in the 21st century.

The first mind is the disciplined mind to gather knowledge about scholarly disciplines and to master the major ways of thinking. Although they should become an expert in one discipline, you should not only see through the eyes of an economist, psychologist etc. We are all flooded with information and that is why it is essential to develop the synthesizing mind by selecting and relating information. The creative mind is about breaking new ground, putting forward new ideas, posing unfamiliar questions and finding unexpected answers. It's about thinking out of the box. But first they will need to have a box.

These three minds are oriented on the individual. The respectful and the ethical mind are oriented on the collective, oriented on the other and society. The respectful mind recognizes and respects differences, seeks to understand others and to work together with one another. The ethical mind is about good work, doing things that are excellent, engaged and ethical. About asking yourself questions such as: 'Do you make a difference for the other? Why are you here? What should the world be like? What is your meaning?'

Seven steps

Let us take a closer look at the route with the seven steps that are designed in the project 'To-Gather' for a young democratic citizen. Each step is a didactical step as well as a learning and a living strategy for the young learner.

1. Sense opened citizen

- to become conscious of your startingpoint
- to relate the self to the other
- to use aesthetics and especially music
- to think out of the box

Who are you and where are you coming from? You will start to develop a 'multiple choice identity' in a 'multiple society' by opening the senses towards the self, the other and the future profession. You visualize your own identity, place it in a context and share it with others. For example: What music is meaningful to you? Why? Use music as a way to communicate.

It's essential that your own identity is based on sufficient 'Bildung', a strong commitment and an open mind towards the self and the other. You learn to think 'out of the box' and to develop a balanced identity. Essential for this step are the five minds for the future, five possibilities or talents prepare yourself in a good way for your future profession. 'It's hard to become who you are' and to find your way, but we can work it out.

2. Knowledge based citizen

- to gather knowledge from different disciplines
- to use systems thinking
- to use multiple intelligences

You gather highly qualified knowledge about ‘the multiple society’ and its cultural heritage (‘Bildung’). How are past, present and future linked? You use systems-thinking to know and understand the developments in society as a system with linear, cyclical and chaotic features. You gather ‘sublime knowledge’ by learning and relating different disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, economy, aesthetics, sociology, combined with an outlook from multiple perspectives of different countries or cultures in Europe while using multiple intelligences such as the linguistic, bodily, musical, logical, mathematical, interpersonal and intrapersonal one. This sublime knowledge is t-shaped because it is broad and deep. The high level is individually assigned through an individual test, by performing a role-play and by designing your own organizer, the Field of View.

You learn in an innovative way through music, different learning styles and disciplines, balancing traditional and innovative learning styles such as teacher-centred and learner-centred education or through individual and cooperative learning.

3. Problem-solving citizen

- -to conduct research
- -to experience practice
- -to use real life learning
- -to use lateral thinking
- -to be creative and problem-solving

This step is about the transfer of knowledge, insights and attitudes into reality. You can research about your future profession through ‘real life learning’ and experience it in practice for a few days. What would you like to know? This is a chance to build your own network and to get a deeper insight into problem-solving. In this way it becomes meaningful for you as a preparation for your profession. You have to be creative while conducting research and by solving problems related to your profession in the future. This is based on the knowledge, insight and attitudes, internalised in step 1 and 2. Furthermore you learn contemporary skills for the present and the future in order to develop your own identity by using multiple intelligence, network-learning, creative thinking and digital didactics.

4. Communicative citizen

- -to exchange ideas about subjects in history, sociology, philosophy, economy, pedagogy or music on www.to-gather.org
- -to develop your own values inside the framework of human rights
- -to communicate about the research and practice
- -to realize the intercultural dialogue

You communicate and cooperate about newly found knowledge with other students. It's also possible to communicate with students from other parts of Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East. You communicate with others about the research by exchanging ideas and material about the future profession in the multiple society on the website www.to-gather.org. A goal is to have an intercultural dialogue in order to develop a 'multiple choice identity' inside the framework of human rights.

5. Creative citizen

- -to use different learning strategies
- -to search for the unknown
- -to create a product by using multiple intelligences
- -to transform the research and the practical experience into a festival with all kind of 'acts'

You gather new knowledge, insight and attitudes and transfer the research for a festival into workshops, images, a report, a performance, an exhibit and/or a new 'MCI-clip'. It is a multi-disciplined, multi-perspectivistic and multiple intelligent way of learning and creating.

6. Cooperative citizen

- -to present the product to others
- -to imagine your own learning process
- -to balance the five minds for the future
- -to realize 'good work'

You are proud of your part as good work because it is excellent, esthetical and engaged. The essay, the MCI-clip, the performance and the exhibit are meaningful and transferable to your profession. You also experience the products of other students as an interpretation and legitimation of the five minds for the future.

7. Reflective and active citizen

- to transfer knowledge, skills and attitude about active citizenship into behaviour in real life, as an 'art of living' and lifelong learning
- -to practice 'core reflection' and write a reflective report
- -to balance the five minds for the future
- -to realize 'the multiple choice identity'
- -to go for 'lifelong learning'

You transform everything you learned into a plan of action, which is committed to values and norms inside the framework of human rights. You reflect on your learning process and product by exchanging knowledge, insights and attitudes in the different steps. You act and feel responsible as a 'multiple choice identity', thinking 'out of the box'.

You give meaning to your future profession as good work, transforming what you learned into active democratic citizenship as lifelong learning. You have become a 'life-artist' in this dynamic and changing society by using new learning styles with aesthetics and especially music, multiple intelligences, creative learning as well as systems thinking and lateral thinking (Edward de Bono).

'It's hard to become who you are'

As good practice we will now concentrate on the making of the film 'It's hard to become who you are', relating young people, 'the multiple society', Europe in the past and the development of a 'multiple choice identity' in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East (Fromkin,1998).

The starting point for the making of this film is a worry about what's going on and what it means for the youth of today. Are young people able to find their own good way? Then they should know what's going on, be active, creative, respectful to the other and ethical by using values and norms. They should use the five minds for the future and also the intercultural dialogue between Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East to create a 'multiple choice identity'.

But the film is also warning for:

- the rise of fundamentalism, xenophobia and populism
- the lack of knowledge and the spreading of wrong knowledge
- the lack of interest for history and also the inability to look from different perspectives or cultures
- the narcissistic young person in 'the bubble' and blindness for evil
- the influence of hyperreality and virtual reality (media, commerce and internet)
- the lack of respect for nature and the other

'I'll never let you go if you promise not to fade away, never fade away, our hopes and expectations' (From 'Starlight, Muse).

Young people are growing up, playing different roles depending on place and time. Can they be themselves in 'the unbearable lightness of being' (Kundera)? Are they ready for the future? The youth of today is diverse, flexible, unbounded and paradoxical. What is their responsibility for the other, the world and the future? Do they know what's going on? Do they have too many possibilities in 'the risk society'? Should they be active or passive, individualistic or collective, happy or sad, narcissistic or empathic, weak or strong, materialistic or idealistic, hedonistic or ethical, free or insecure etc.. In the film 'It's hard to become who you are' possible answers are given to these questions and new questions are asked. It is about the life of young people in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East, personified in a young woman and played by Duygu Akkaya as the leading actress. Finally she appears to be 'Europe'.

She is coming of age, experiencing different and sometimes opposite life-styles. She's like a Greek hero in a tragedy and a princess in a fairy tale, looking for happiness and threatened by evil. She wants to dance on her red shoes. Sometimes she dances in other man's shoes or in blood red shoes. She's like Schindler, mixing the roles of a

perpetrator, collaborator, by-stander, protestant or victim. She's a modern young woman, who is confronted with the history of Europe, while visiting the cultural heritage of Europe, internalising the way of thinking and meeting historical persons. Historical experience is an interior imaginatory process of curiosity, astonishment and bewilderment. But when she loses her memory, she will lose her identity. In some parts of the film she is personally involved in a historical event. For her there's a lot of past that's no history.

'It's hard to become who you are' is a magic realistic film about reality, hyperreality and virtual reality with Duygu Akkaya as the leading actress of flesh and blood.

She takes the train ('To-Gather Express') to find out who she is and to meet the youth of today in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East. In each of the five compartments of the train she meets young people of a specific life style with hedonist, gothic, activist, depressive or empathic features. The train is the metaphor of 'the soul of Europe', taking her back to places like Athens, Rome, Granada, Aachen, Amsterdam, Paris, Ypres, Auschwitz, Berlin, Ljubljana, Brussels and Lowlands. At each place she is confronted with the self and the other, the past and the present. The meeting point or decor is the cultural heritage: a Greek temple, the Pantheon, the Alhambra, the Dam, the Arc de Triomphe, the Death Trench, Auschwitz, the Berlin Wall, Preseren Square, Madou Tower or the festival of Lowlands.

Welcome to the double life of Europe as a young person and as Europe in 'the desert of the real' (The Matrix).

The film starts in Istanbul, where she meets the youth of today and gets into trouble, by losing contact with reality, young people and herself. She's living in a bubble (Peter Sloterdijk, 2004). A wise man (Ettore Deodato) shows her the way. It's hard fun. Step by step and through ups and downs, she tries to develop a 'multiple choice identity' and to internalise the five minds for the future.

The five episodes in the film are aspects of her life-story as well as phases in the history of Europe. It is amazing that circumstances, values, behaviour, possibilities, problems, dreams, fears and responsibilities in personal life and in European history are essentially the same. The sentence 'Man makes history but he doesn't know which one' (Jorge Semprun) may also be related to the life of the youth of today. The way of the world as a biography, meandering between freedom and security, heaven and hell, beauty and ugliness, happiness and fear, progress and destruction, ratio and emotion, the self and the other, good and evil.

It's an amazing intense and hectic life story because it's hard to choose between opposites, to anticipate, to hide in her bubble, to think outside of the box, to stand for her right. She may be overwhelmed by a big power or evil. 'Anything goes' or does she have to choose, focussing on good work that's excellent, engaged and ethical? How can she be ready for a future that's not like it was before?

The viewer will be left with questions such as: How can or shall I behave? Who or what is going to temper the fire (Peter Sloterdijk, 2007)? Is God dead? Can I become myself?

What are my choices and possibilities? What is my responsibility? What is real? Who is the other? Can I still hang on to a dream? What is the way of the world? Is the future like it never was before?

During the making of the film in 2010-2012, educational material and learning routes will be designed and research will be done by teachers and PhD-students in the networks of EMUNI, ETEN and CiCe. Fragments of the film will be presented at the annual conferences of these networks. Also Hanze European University Groningen, National Agencies, the Agency in Brussels and the Cabinet of Jan Figel) will play an important role in the implementation of the film. The film may be integrated in the curriculum of schools in these networks in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East. That's why a special version of 45 minutes will be made in order to combine it with a lecture or a workshop at school. The long version of 90 minutes can be shown in the cinemas, arthouses or other places.

The film is made for the youth of today (16 through 30 years old), inclusive those, who are not interested in knowledge, Europe and the other, the past and the future. It's a sense opener, a source of knowledge and way of communication and reflection.

It should be fascinating, challenging, meaningful and applicable for young people in secondary and higher education and at universities, as well as young people who are looking for or doing a job. They are from different levels, backgrounds and cultures and should be able to recognize themselves in the leading actress and her life-story.

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