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TO-GATHER festivals in Europe: Youth stimulators for understanding multiple intelligence

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide an overview and explain the significance of a To-Gather festival–creative conferences held in Latvia. To-gather festivals have been held in a number European countries and have aimed to introduce participants to the project framework and stimulate thinking about their multiple identities in a diverse world.

Keywords: *Festivals, identity, mobility, choice possibilities, citizenship, changing world*

The international Comenius project ‘To-Gather’ – Multiple choice identity’ has come to its evaluation stage. Each partner country organizes events in the framework of the international project. Previously festivals have been hosted in Hertogenbosh, Netherlands (2009), Liverpool, UK (2010), Istanbul, Turkey (2010), Haslev, Denmark (2010), Coimbra, Portugal (2011), Torhout, Belgium (2011), Presov, Slovakia (2011). Over the years the number of partner countries involved in the project has increased to 12 countries and student participation has been from all levels - primary schools, elementary schools, secondary schools and universities.

Cooperating partners in Latvia – Jūrmala State gymnasium, Primary school ‘Atvase’ and Riga Teachers Training Educational Management Academy (RTTEMA) – organized a creative conference-festival ‘To-Gather’ in order to show the success of the work done in the period between 2005 – 2010. Participants came from different education constituents including students from primary, and secondary schools and university, teachers (primary, secondary, university), school directors, as well as professors from six European countries (Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, Lithuania) and government representatives (local and national). It is viewed as positive that the festival-conference involved different generations and societies around the To-Gather idea. The students’ role was very significant in that they led and participated in the event from beginning to the end thus fostering as sense of purposeful engagement and ownership. In all 187 delegates took part in the creative conference-festival. The Latvian conference was held in Jurmala State gymnasium, and was highly evaluated with respect to its organisation and the quality of sessions.

The project helps educators to lead young people with the ‘7-step conception’ as promoted by To-Gather (see <http://to-gather.org/>). In step 1 the learner opens his senses through music, images, words, dance and/or drama. Furthermore he gathers knowledge in step 2 from different entry points and transfers it into reality in a problem-solving way (step 3). In step 4 he communicates with other learners in or outside the class and starts to make a product of it. Step 5 is the preparation and creation and step 6 the presentation.

Finally the learners reflect on the process and the product and integrate it in reality (step 7).

Inspired by the work of Howard Gardner, each step is a phase in the learning process and a step towards democratic citizenship. It is the strategy of learning and living to become a good and balanced human using 5 senses (minds) for the future. The conference-festival included theoretical discussion of Gardner's work and the 'steps' in the to-gather project as well as in active and creative workshops that addressed concerns of young people. It also included sessions from international speakers as well as those from Latvia, who talked about new, innovative approaches in organising pedagogical processes involving creative expression through different forms of art. Further, youngsters had the possibility to participate in such workshops as 'Make your own song', 'Beatbox and Dance', 'Do you want to be a film star?', but for the teachers and the students of RTTEMA more interesting were the workshops 'To be on not be European?', 'Problems of mobility and migration'. In short there were a variety of activities designed to suit different participants. The programme also included dance performances and events to give a cultural flavour of Latvia.

Through these activities the project aimed to promote understanding in young people in order to:

- develop one's own identity in Europe, to balance five minds for the future;
- to summarize basic knowledge about the past, present and future in different ways;
- learn from different academic subjects like history, sociology, pedagogics, psychology, economics, philosophy, architecture, aesthetics;
- form cross-cultural dialogues looking at cultures in Europe, North Africa and Arabic countries taking into account different viewpoints about human rights;
- use aesthetics and particularly music as the mind opener, information source, problem solver, as the way of communication, creativity, cooperation and for reflection;
- learn in a way of innovative system-thinking, new strategies and modern didactics.

A Final feedback session was included involving a meeting of all people who were involved in the organization of the festival, giving opportunity to express, exchange and reflect on experiences and discuss solutions and recommendations. Recommendations, including stress on using *Mixed Activities Model*, where different activities are mixed (eg, lecture, performance, workshop etc., including outdoor activities where possible; and a *Building Mood Activities Model*, to start from more cognitive activities (e.g. symposium, lecture) through common work (workshop) to the expression (especially, performance which involve people like common singing and dancing). A recommendation was also to intersperse cognitive activities with short performance – dance or a song.

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