



DJS/EYCB/IC sem/2007/44

Budapest, 3 October 2007

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

INTRODUCTION
CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

| In the background of the seminar... |

The mainstreaming of intercultural learning in European youth work

Intercultural 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 occur in multicultural environments, intercultural learning has been almost like the mantra in European youth work.

Very much under influence of the educational practice of the European Youth Centre, intercultural learning became also 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: recognizing 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 environment. 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 practiced 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 of also placing 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 the 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 of the awareness that not all diversity is cultural, not all discriminations are based on culture and that culture can not 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 to avoid the nationalization of culture in an international environment? How to 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 recognize a certain legitimacy in all the processes but emphasised the individual learning aspects while 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 practiced, 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 emphasized. The efforts for normalization and democratization of intercultural 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 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 legitimizing 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 into questions their relevance.

Events completely

beyond the control of European youth workers would further contribute to assert new roles to cultures, sometimes elevated to the rank of civilisations. In the wars against terrors, we would not only risk sacrificing universal human rights but also one of the very fundamental assumption of intercultural learning: that all cultures have a similar basic intrinsic value. Cultural relativism got a further boost by the formidably publicized (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 being drafted. The European Union has 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 answer 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 DYS and how it is perceived and practiced. 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 critique of intercultural learning was made. In “Plastic, Political and Contingent – Culture and Intercultural Learning in DYS activities”, Gavan Titley analyses some of the conceptual problems and inadequacies which resulted in that the “dominant approaches to intercultural learning have become irredeemably weakened”. The paper also proposes several questions to 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 in 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 trainings?
- How to integrate and develop the practices of intercultural learning in non-formal education for the purpose of intercultural dialogue?
- How to develop a critique of intercultural dialogue and intercultural learning that is constructive and takes into account their potential for social transformation?
- 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.

| Aims and objectives |

The seminar aims 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.

Objectives:

- 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 among;
- To identify needs for training and research related to intercultural practices of non-formal education.

| Programme, methods and outcomes |

In the framework of the objectives above-mentioned, the seminar should be first and foremost an opportunity to debate some of the questions and issues related to intercultural learning. The outcomes of the debates and exchange may result in proposals for the future in the programme of the Directorate of Youth and Sport.

The work of the seminar will be framed by plenary inputs of experts who will propose their responses to some of the questions. Working groups will deepen the issues and, where appropriate, formulate proposals for conclusions.

There will be limited or no possibilities for formally presenting written articles, research papers or essays, other than those asked for by the secretariat of the meeting. However, we'll welcome

any documents or reflections to be circulated before the seminar. Where appropriate, the Council of Europe will also publish those documents in the form of a book or seminar document.

| Participants |

The seminar should bring together thirty youth workers, trainers in non-formal education, educational experts and researchers and youth policy experts. They all should:

- Be interested and experienced in the topics of intercultural learning and/or intercultural dialogue;
- Be familiar with the practice of intercultural learning in non-formal education activities;
- Be ready to contribute to the programme and reflections of the seminar;
- Be able to work in English;
- Be available for the full duration of the seminar.

| Practical and financial conditions |

Timetable

The seminar will start at 09:30 on Wednesday 28 November and finish at 18:00 on Thursday 29 November. A detailed programme will be sent later to the participants

Venue and accommodation

The seminar will be held at the European Youth centre Budapest (EYCB) [Zivatar u. 1-3, H-1024 Budapest].

Since the EYCB can not provide accommodation to the seminar participants, the participants are expected to book themselves in nearby hotels. The secretariat of the EYCB can provide assistance for this purpose.

Travel and subsistence expenses

Travel expenses to and from Budapest will be reimbursed according to the rules of the Council of Europe. Each participant will receive a daily per diem of 169 € to cover for local transport, accommodation and subsistence expenses. The reimbursements will be made by bank transfer after the seminar.

Working languages

The seminar will be held in English.

Application procedure

All those interested in applying for the seminar can obtain a copy of the application form by emailing Zsuzsanna Molnar at the European Youth Centre Budapest (zsuzsanna.molnar@coe.int). The deadline for returning applications is **20 October 2007**