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DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH EDUCATION

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Language is a means of forming and storing ideas as reflections of reality and exchanging them in the process of human intercourse. Language is social by nature; it is inseparably connected with the people who are its creators and users; it grows and develops together with the development of society.

In a language description we generally deal with three essential parts known as phonology, vocabulary, and grammar. These various ranges, or levels, are the subject matter of the various branches of linguistics. We may think of vocabulary as the word-stock, and grammar as the set of devices for handling this word-stock. It is due precisely to these devices that language is able to give material linguistic form to human thought.

Robert Lado wrote that language functions owing to the language skills. A person who knows a language perfectly uses a thousand and one grammar lexical, phonetic rules when he is speaking. Language skills help us to choose different words and models in our speech.

Linguistic studies of recent years contain a vast amount of important observations based on acute observations valid for further progressive development of different aspects of the science of language. The conception of the general form of grammars has steadily developed. What becomes increasingly useful for insight into the structure and functioning of language is orientation towards involving lexis in studying grammar. Today linguists have well-established techniques for the study of language from a number of different points of view. Each of these techniques supplements all the others in contributing to theoretical knowledge and the practical problems of the day.

Intercultural education refers to a *pedagogy* – aims, content, learning processes, teaching methods, syllabus and materials, and assessment – one purpose of which is to develop intercultural competence in learners of all ages in all types of education as a foundation for dialogue and living together.

Intercultural competence can be developed in different ways through different types of education. Three types of education exist and for the purposes of this paper are defined following the Council of Europe (2010) Charter on EDC and HRE [1; 18]:



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- *Informal education* means the lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience and conversation (family, peer group, neighbours, encounters, library, mass media, work, play, etc.).

In informal education – for example in what is learnt from parents, carers, peers, journalists and others in one’s social environment – intercultural competence is acquired with differing degrees of deliberate activity on the part of parents, carers, peers, journalists and others. Parents, for example, may have a *pedagogical approach* to developing intercultural competence which is more or less conscious and deliberate, or bring up their children with no deliberate intercultural purpose at all.

- *Non-formal education* means any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences outside the formal educational setting, and throughout lifelong learning.

In non-formal education – as provided for example by local communities, NGOs, youth work, adult education and social work – intercultural competence is a *pedagogical goal* pursued through deliberate inclusion of specific activities for learning.

- *Formal education* means the structured education and training system that runs from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to higher education. It takes place, as a rule, at general or vocational educational institutions and usually leads to certification.

In formal education, the *pedagogy of intercultural competence* involves the planned inclusion of learning outcomes defined in terms of the components of intercultural competence. In formal education, with its high degree of planning, responsibility for developing intercultural competence in learners reaches across the explicit and the ‘hidden’ curriculum, and is shared by all teachers albeit to differing degrees.[3; 67] Each type of education involves a relationship between a ‘facilitator of learning’ and ‘learners’. In informal learning there are, for example, parents and children, or adults learning together, for example politicians, artists, professionals in the media, religious, spiritual or community leaders, work colleagues or fellow students learning from each other; in non-formal education there are, for example, for example, youth workers and young people or trainers and adults; in formal education there are teachers/lecturers and pupils/students.



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‘Facilitators’ usually have intentions or purposes throughout their interaction with those in their charge. Teachers, youth workers and adult education tutors, for example, are trained to plan and design their lessons and activities, and do so in a conscious way, whereas parents may sometimes consciously plan activities for their children, or follow advice from books, or imitate their own parents, or adopt what is customary in their community, or follow practices they see on television, and do so intuitively. In informal learning, where people are constantly learning from each other, they can have the intention, more or less conscious, of influencing others. However, informal learning can also sometimes take place through observation and imitation, without any intentions to influence by the person whose actions are imitated by the learner.

Principles of planning

Planning and pursuing the development of intercultural competence amongst learners is thus important for all facilitators of learning. Some will do so deliberately as a professional task as teachers, youth workers, social workers, for example; others will do so less deliberately, as an inherent aspect of their role as parents, employers, politicians, etc.; and yet others will do so often without any conscious planning or awareness of what they ‘teach’ by what they do or say.

In most cases there are some principles of planning which are related to the different components of intercultural competence described earlier. Facilitators need to include in their planning:[5;98]

- *Experience*: Developing attitudes of respect, curiosity and openness, as well as acquiring knowledge about other cultural orientations and affiliations, are best pursued through directly experiencing how people act, interact and communicate – from their perspective. Facilitators may well provide opportunities for learning through experience, which can be either ‘real’ or ‘imagined’; learners are able to gain experiences, for example, through games, activities, traditional media and social media, through face-to-face interaction with others or through correspondence. Parents may select books for their children or travel with them to other neighbourhoods, regions and countries; youth workers may organise training events and international meetings for young people; or history teachers may plan dramatic reconstructions or activities that aim to develop multiperspectivity. All of these examples can provide opportunities for challenging one’s assumptions through *comparison* and *analysis*.



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- *Comparison*: In order to encourage understanding and respect for people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from themselves, learners can benefit from exposure to 'difference'. Learners often compare what is unfamiliar with what is familiar and evaluate the unfamiliar as 'bizarre', or as 'worse' and even as 'uncivilized'. Facilitators need to be aware of this kind of 'comparison of value' and replace it with 'comparison for understanding', which involves seeing similarities and differences in a non-judge mental manner and taking the perspective of 'the other' in order to 'see ourselves as others see us'. In other words, learners can be encouraged to develop an understanding of how what is normal for them can be regarded as 'bizarre' or 'uncivilized' from someone else's perspective and vice versa, and that both are simply 'different' in some aspects and 'alike' in other aspects. Learners thus reflect on and are engaged in a conscious comparison of their own values and attitudes with different ones, in order to better realize how they construct 'the other'. [2; 56]

- *Analysis*: Behind similarities and differences, there are explanations for the practices, the values and the beliefs which many people of a particular cultural affiliation may share. Facilitators can support their learners in the analysis of what may lie beneath what they can see others doing and saying. This can be achieved, for example, by careful discussion and analysis, through inquiry based methods, of written or audio/video sources. The analysis can then be reflected back on the learners so that they may question their own practices, values and beliefs.

- *Reflection*: Comparison, analysis and experience need to be accompanied by time and space for reflection and the development of critical awareness and understanding. Facilitators, especially in non-formal and formal education, need to ensure that such time and space is provided in a deliberate and planned way. For example, teachers may ask students to discuss their experiences, encourage students to keep a logbook to keep track of their learning, and write or draw or share or otherwise respond to what they have learnt; but parents may also sit quietly with their children to talk about an experience.

- *Action*: Reflection can and should be the basis for taking action, for engagement with others through intercultural dialogue, and for becoming involved in cooperative activities with people who have different cultural affiliations. Facilitators may take the responsibility of encouraging and even managing cooperative action, for example in making improvements in the social and physical environment (through



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‘whole school’ approaches or school partnerships) and should emphasize that all action should be responsible and respectful.

In some educational systems, teachers are supported or facilitated by clear policies and official curriculum intent and content on intercultural education; in other situations, though intercultural education is adopted at the official curriculum discourse level, it is not supported by other practices; and in other contexts there is no official or other support and whether intercultural education is somehow pursued depends largely on the teacher.

For some teachers, intercultural education and competence are obviously central to their concerns and planning because they teach about the social world and/or the world of the individual human being. For others, intercultural education and competence appear distant from their focus since they teach about the natural world. [4;178]

The successful development of intercultural competence, and the realization of the social vision upon which it is based, relies crucially upon the commitment and support of a wide range of stakeholders, including politicians, policy makers, education and training professionals, religious, spiritual and community leaders, parents and careers, and of course learners themselves. To enable the development of intercultural competence through education writ large, the committed support of all these stakeholders is required. This document aims at inspiring such support.

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