5. Workshops

5.1 Preparing for an exchange

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Introduction

Very often, international youth projects involve some kind of an intercultural exchange. The exchange could be that of a youth group meeting another and spending a week together, it could be some kind of a seminar where participants from a great variety of backgrounds take part, or it could be an individual going to spend a couple of months or even years abroad.

No matter what kind of exchange is going to happen, it makes sense to prepare participants for the experience in order for them to make more out of that encounter.
Given these background thoughts, the two main aims of such a preparation are then, firstly, to help participants to get to know themselves, their roots – to see themselves as "cultural" beings. Secondly, in such a preparation participants should be made aware of cultural difference, they should be equipped with the senses to notice when cultural differences interfere in a situation.

This example of a preparation workshop is based on a number of assumptions to make it more concrete:
- the time-frame is one weekend,
- there are about 12 participants and 2-3 trainers
- there is a common language for everybody
- the preparation is for an individual long-term exchange

Programme

Friday evening:

- Energizer (20 min): "Can you see what I see". Try to focus the discussion on what it means to take on a different perspective, and why you "normally" stick to the way you look at things. Can you appreciate a different perspective?
- Group-building exercise (90 minutes): This is to establish trust in the group for the remainder of the workshop. Use, for example, "the eggcercise", but have the whole group do it together. This will work well with a group that is quick to build relationships between each other. As an alternative, you can use any icebreaker as long as it will allow participants to get to know each other, and where they do things that they can only do together (building trust). If you feel the group is okay with it, you can invite them, finally, to do a "blind walk" – a walk, where participants get together in couples, and while one person of the couple is closing his/her eyes, the other one is leading him/her. Make sure you change roles after a while, e.g. after 20 minutes.
- You could finish the evening with a session to clarify all the practical issues that still need to be resolved around the exchange. The idea behind doing it this early in the programme is that these questions are there anyway and may otherwise dominate the whole programme.

Saturday morning

- Individual exercise (all morning): "My path towards the other". Make sure you have "cells" that relate to childhood/family, school, friends, "significant others" in your life, and a cell where participants can think of the society/region/nation they come from. Ensure that you place items in the cells that open up thinking, that stimulate people to reflect, and not things that influence participants to think in a specific direction. Especially with the cell on the society-background, you might be tempted to assume that you "know" how this influence can be pictured as it does not seem very individual. It is important, however, that you give participants the freedom to find out for themselves what it means for them to consider the fact that they grew up in a place (or maybe in a few places) with people of a particular language, etc.
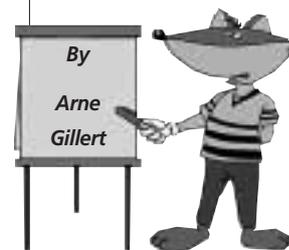
Make sure you plan in enough time (at least one hour) before the lunch break for people to share what they have found out. This you can easily do, for example, in smaller groups of 4-5 participants. To round up, discuss in plenary how people feel that all of these roots will play a role in situations where they meet people that have had completely different roots.

Saturday afternoon
- Start off the afternoon with "Abigale" (90 minutes). In the debrief, ask participants to relate their opinion of who acts "better" or "worse" to their backgrounds/roots as they described them in the morning. Are there any influences from family, society, friends, etc. that made them think the way they did?
- For the rest of the afternoon, run a research project. For example, you can walk into the town where the meeting takes place and act as anthropologists exploring the culture of the place you are in. What can you find out about it? Can you find out how people would react in the "Abigale" game – or is this just a speculation, based on stereotypes and prejudice? What does this mean for you going to live abroad for a while?

Sunday morning

- A shorter simulation game, that practices the encounter with "difference". In just a single morning, it is impossible to play a very extended simulation. However, a small experience of "difference" can be simulated and looked at as an "appetizer" for intercultural learning. The main aim is to have (part of) the group go through a role-play in which they are confronted with others that do things differently, whose behaviours are not easy to decode. The focus of the debrief is on the feelings people have when confronted with a situation in which they cannot decode what they experience, in which actions of others remain "strange". After realizing the feelings of uncertainty, childishness, etc., you may want to shift your emphasis to strategies one can develop on how to deal with these situations. What are your options when you do not understand somebody else?
- The weekend ends with an evaluation and an outlook on the exchange and what will happen in the days or weeks before the departure of the participants.

5.2 Minority and Majority

This workshop on minority/majority relations is designed to encourage participants to identify and discuss the challenges faced in our communities between minority and majorities, and to find possible solutions to these challenges. This workshop can be run with all target groups not necessarily where minorities and majorities are present. It can be run on its own or as part of a wider activity.

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The workshop should address challenges such as:

- Racism
- Xenophobia
- anti-Semitism
- Romaphobia
- Religion
- Ethnocentrism
- Stereotypes and prejudices

What you need to consider when running the workshop:

A workshop on minority-majority relations is always a unique experience for participants. Facilitators should be aware that the readiness of the participants to discuss the issues comfortably and the experience of the facilitator in leading the group determine the outcomes of such a workshop. The following considerations may be helpful here:

- *A quality atmosphere (space):* both the physical and emotional space is very important. This workshop should be run in a large room and possibly with chairs in a circle to allow participants to be open and welcoming. The facilitator should be aware that some people would not be very comfortable at the start. Icebreakers are quite useful here.

- *Time:* allow adequate time and ensure participants get the most out of the time allocated. Remember it is detrimental to participants to have an unfinished workshop

- *Choosing methods:* ensure first that methods will bring out the experiences of the participants and will give also enough material for analysing and deepening these experiences in their daily lives.

Here is a suggested structure for such a workshop:

1 Energiser: a name game if participants do not know each other. If they do, a short version of a statement exercise (10-min) would warm up the participants
2 Introduce workshop: Why am I here? This is to map out expectations of participants. This should be done in groups of 2 or 3 depending on the size of the group. Allow a presentation of group results. Make a synthesis of the expectations and ask participants to comment on anything they find strange, relevant or irrelevant and the reasons for this.
3 Introduce concept: theoretical input allow time for questions and clarifications.
4 Simulation exercise that brings the issues alive.
5 Challenges and solutions: Input (intercultural learning) or open discussion on possible solutions.
6 Transfer to the realities of participants: Where do we go from here? This should be done in small groups and reported to the whole group.
7 Evaluation: A creative exercise that allow participants to reflect and at the same time energise to take a step further to work on these issues

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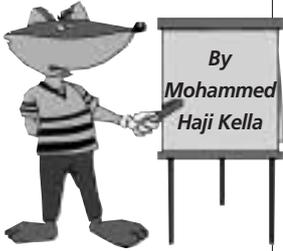
5.3 Intercultural conflict resolution

Intercultural conflicts occur usually between two or more opposing groups. We are becoming more and more involved in conflict due to the differences that exists between our environment and ourselves. Most intercultural conflicts are the result of intolerance and ignorance of these differences. Generally, in human development, conflict can be a productive factor as individuals try to identify and define their own space for development. On the other hand it has also proven in most circumstances to be destructive and unproductive, especially where one party dominates and where no coherent and/or non-violent dialogue exists.

Why a workshop on intercultural conflict resolution?

Facilitators and youth leaders in particular are confronted with this question in training activities. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer. First, all conflicts are unique in origin, secondly approaches to conflict resolution whether in a plenary or in the neighbourhood are relative and depend on the nature of conflict. Nonetheless, it is important that facilitators and participants are aware that conflicts, especially in intercultural encounters can occur without prior notice. This is justified with the present realities of our own environments that are often reflected in the intercultural encounters.

What is responsible for these realities?

Categorisation and ethnocentrism in our societies:
Human beings always have the tendency of putting others into pigeonholes. This often helps us to shape the world around us and make it comfortable to live in. Such categories for example are sex, race, social status, etc. The need to make our world better for ourselves always tempts us to prioritise groups according to our perception about them. When we prioritise, we put our group in the driving seat, while we put others at the back as they are of less value. The consequences are usually transferred into stereotyping, lack of respect for other cultures, discrimination and racism. Conflicts in these situations are often unavoidable, as the less valued group becomes vulnerable and insecure.

What types of conflict are we commonly confronted with?

Conflicts usually occur at different levels: from our personal lives to organisational and national levels. These levels can be summarised as:

Intra-personal: as individuals we are often in conflict with ourselves, about our values, choices and commitments in life.

Inter-personal: disagreement between two people on a purely personal level

Inter-group or organisational level: such conflicts occur between groups on the basis of values, power and relative equality, e.g.: organisation and a government.

Inter-cultural or community: conflicts that occur between two groups owing to struggle for territory, religious superiority, cultural values and norms. E.g.: Jews and Arabs, Muslims and Christians etc;

National conflict: conflict between nations…

Intercultural conflicts: are they part of every day conflicts?

All conflicts are based on differences, usually when they are not adequately or constructively addressed, where both sides can feel secure with each other. These occur through a variety of factors. The following are common examples in intercultural conflicts:

Facts – what fact particular cultural groups "know" about each other and how are these facts perceived and understood. The Misconception scenario plays a vital part here.

Needs – Especially in a minority /majority situation, people need to feel secure in their lives. These include a sense of belonging to the community, being treated equally without oppression.

Values – This includes respect for each culture's beliefs and practices. In most cases of intercultural conflicts, values of others are assumed or threatened e.g. the issue around gender equality, religious freedom etc. Usually when a value is assumed, one seems to predominate while the other feels threatened.

Possible indicators of the development of intercultural conflicts.
Unlike other types of conflicts, intercultural conflict is usually difficult to understand, especially for the outsider. This is practically due to the length of the incubation period (or the amount of time taken for the conflict to become visible).
• Groups of the conflict clearly emerged with concrete aims and uncompromising objectives
• Stereotypes are more pronounced
• Communication between the parties becomes difficult
• Groups become more cohesive, but hyper-negative towards the other
• Strong leadership emerged with uncompromising leadership qualities within the groups.

Principles of intercultural conflict resolution
Catharsis: this is a must for all groups' work on conflict as they need to be given space to express their feelings towards one another. The concept of catharsis advocates the need for the individuals to pour out their negative feelings that should be given a full legitimacy. It also allows an atmosphere of confidence leading to a successful group process.

Self-exposure: allowing the group to expose their motivations and personal feelings about each other.

Common fears and hopes: Groups to be facilitated to understand the fact that they have similar fears and that discussing this can help break down barriers and lead to common hopes and understandings.

Methods of intercultural learning in conflict resolution
There are several methods of intercultural learning that can be used in conflict resolution. Appropriate methods can be suggested by observing the following principles.

Safe space: the workshop should be organised where parties to the conflict can meet on personal and group level

Equal status in the meeting: interchange must take place through equal acceptance of each other in the situation.
Ground rules of discussion: the group should use consensus for deciding how to run the workshop. Rules should include listening and respecting each other.

Activities that facilitate common interest: it is very important to create common interest in the group.

Structuring your workshop – what the facilitator needs to know

The questions often asked are:
• When am I suppose to run a workshop on intercultural conflict resolution?
• What am I suppose to do as a facilitator?
• How do I know that young people get the best out of the workshop?

These are practical questions that should be reflective and self explainable. This part of the T-kit has no intention of answering these questions, but gives guidelines as to how you can deliver a well structured workshop. Before you structure your workshop, ask yourself the following questions:

❏ Who is it for?
❏ What is its relevance to your target group?
❏ What are they likely to get from it?
❏ How comfortable and ready are you to engage your target group in this process?

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There are many other questions you need to ask yourself, please feel free to do so, but these are probably the most common questions often asked. Once you are quite clear on these, now is the time to structure your workshop. Again it is important to stress that there is no one structure or common way of running a workshop. The workshop structure usually depends upon your target group and their expectations. With regards to the selection of methods, chapter 4 of this T-Kit has suggested some useful guidelines to be considered. Here is a typical structure:

1 **Getting started and setting the scene:** depending upon the issue, you may want to start with an ice breaker, possibly a name game, so that people feel secure with each other.
2 **Engaging participants with the theme and its relevance to their realities** (personal experience): here it is suggested to work on personal experiences of participants, looking at their expectations and what they would like to get from the session
3 **Introducing the theme: a theoretical input** (stereotypes, prejudice etc.). backgrounds and linking to present realities.
4 **Simulation exercise:** to explore the theme further and linking to personal realities… again own experiences are important
5 **Conclusions and follow up** mainly facilitators should look at various ways out of conflict, or in preventing conflict. It can be useful to make a brief mention of the relevant skills in dealing with conflict and allow participants to relate this to their own work. Practically there are twelve common skills to look at:
Win/win approach
Creative response
• Empathy
• Assertiveness
• Power managing emotions
• Willingness to resolve the conflict
• Strategic mapping of the conflict
• Designing and agreeing on the options
• Negotiation
• Mediation
• Broadening perspectives.

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5.4 Getting people interested in intercultural learning

By
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Introduction

There are so many points of entry into the subject of intercultural learning that it sometimes feels quite frightening. A big question is: where do you start? This is a suggested format for a day's workshop which tries to answer that question. It contains exploration of some of the key concepts necessary to start understanding intercultural learning:

- culture
- stereotypes and prejudice
- intercultural learning as a process
- transfer to everyday reality
- suggestions for follow-up or going further

This workshop could be run independently or as part of a larger activity. The advantages of the second option are: participants already know each other (at least a bit); and there are more possibilities for follow-up after the workshop.

Clearly, all the comments and questions in Chapter 4 on Methodologies and Methods apply here. Particularly important are all the questions relating to your target group – what will they be interested in? How can you arouse their curiosity? How will you help them link the workshop to their reality?

1 Creating an intercultural learning environment

Make sure that your working space is set out to encourage maximum participation, possibly in a circle or, if you have a large group, in groups of tables.

If the participants do not know each other already, then you need to start the process of people feeling comfortable – intercultural learning involves emotional learning and people will not be open if they feel uncomfortable. Following a name game, it might be useful to split people into little groups to share their expectations and report back to the whole group. Then you can introduce the structure of the workshop, including or excluding (if necessary) participants' expectations.

2 Energiser 1: Can you see what I see? Can I see what you see?
See 4.1.2.

3 "Culture" – input and discussion

See 2.4 for discussion of the concept of "culture".

4 Stereotypes & prejudices – exercise

See for example 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.5.2, 4.9.5.

5 Simulation exercise

See 4.4

Note: depending on your aims and the time available, it may be necessary to choose between steps 4 and 5.

6 Energiser 3: 60 seconds = one minute, or does it?

See 4.4.4

7 Intercultural Learning – input and discussion

– what is it? [see fig. 1: "Iceberg" for a visual representation of intercultural learning]
– when can people learn interculturally?

8 Transfer to everyday reality of participants – discussion

How can we apply any of what we have learnt to daily life?
International youth activities?

9 Suggestions for follow-up

Prepare a bibliography for distribution to participants.

10 Evaluation

See 4.8.