

The report on Intercultural Dialogue subgroup activities in VALUE project

At the beginning of our work in 2009 the sub-group identified the need to understand interculturality not only as a cross-border issue but as one which arises within member states, organisations and across generations. Intercultural education was seen as education and training for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding. Dialogue between different communities, civilizations and religions was seen as a means of fostering an actively tolerant attitude. Intercultural education covers both the relevant knowledge, attitudes, emotions and competencies, and research on these as a foundation for practice and well-thought-out policy decisions. During the meetings of the sub-group, intercultural issues were discussed under the following subthemes: learning environments and pedagogical theories/practices; inclusive approaches and identities; values, beliefs in pedagogy, communication and language; diffusion and transformation and teachers' education.

The methods of creating the intercultural dialogue are extremely creative. They involve:

- working in a team,
- developing problem solving skills,
- creative thinking,
- planning and management skills,
- practising a wide range of communication skills, from those necessary to establish

contact and to have a dialogue to ICT skills which allow effective use of electronic mail, a computer and the Internet.

It also provides an opportunity to share the ideas and experience.

Those methods have an impact on the quality of education – working and teaching methods, relations among students, teachers, volunteers, employees and the local environment, etc.

The sub-group was discussing the requirements that this places on volunteers as they seek to understand the organisation and individuals with which they are engaging. The sub-group was reviewing definitions of Interculturality and produced a glossary which reflects its findings.

Definitions of intercultural education

Intercultural education has been seen as education and training for peace, tolerance

and mutual understanding. The dialogue between different communities, civilizations and religions is seen as a means of fostering an actively tolerant attitude. Intercultural education covers both the relevant knowledge, attitudes, emotions and competencies, and research on these as a foundation for practice and well-thought-out policy decisions.

The definitions of intercultural education were divided into process-oriented and aim-oriented ones:

Process-oriented definitions of intercultural education

1. Intercultural education engages with diverse cultures and lifestyles showing respect for them.
2. Intercultural education is about examining differences in cultures and people.
3. Intercultural education requires a new attitude in relation to the other and to ourselves.
4. Intercultural education challenges the inherently dominant modes of doing things and thinking about them.
5. Interculturality recognises that cultures are open one to another and mutually interdependent.

Aim-oriented definitions of intercultural education

1. Intercultural education develops transcultural understanding.
2. Intercultural education is about uncovering stereotypes and the semantic contents of simplified judgements.
3. Intercultural education implies the realisation that the others are different from ourselves and that they make us re-analyse our own system of values.
4. Intercultural education is about stimulating the understanding for otherness.
5. Interculturality admits the mutual influencing of cultures and deals with conflicts among cultures or with their solution.
6. Intercultural education requires that we give attention to books from different cultures in order to reduce prejudice and to develop analytical and critical thinking.

The sub-group was also discussing the topic: Teaching volunteers about professionalism. The conclusions are given below:

Service-learning takes students out of the classroom and into the community and workplace.

This effective practice offers practical suggestions for program directors and educators who

would like to teach their students about professionalism before sending them to sites where they will serve. Many young volunteers may have had little or no previous exposure to the workplace, an environment that is oftentimes unlike anything they have encountered before. Knowing some basic etiquette and skills can go a long way in ensuring that they get the most out of a service-learning experience that takes them out of the halls of academia and into the real world.

The following has been found to be effective ways to teach professionalism to the students:

- Have representatives from the Human Resource departments of respected businesses come and talk about what they are looking for in prospective employees. They would probably also be able to share some fun exercises with the students.
- Send students out for an orientation/training. For example, if they are to be caregivers in the nursery area of the local recreation center, they need to observe how the professionals handle that work, and discuss with their teachers what will be expected of them when they are serving. If, instead, they are to work in the office of the recreation center, answering questions of visitors to the center, they need an orientation session watching how the professional people handle visitor's questions, and how they should dress for this volunteer job. Teach the students about how to be professional by having them — with your guidance — orient themselves to the job specifications.

Ideally, after the students observe at their respective sites, have business people from the community come to speak with them as a follow-up. Based on their orientation/training experiences, the students will be better prepared to ask questions and understand the subject matter.

- Check to see if there is a Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) chapter in the vicinity. Many of these organizations have a "community" committee that sends representatives to talk with high school and college students about the interview process and being responsible employees — coming to work on time, appropriate dress for the workplace, and related topics.

Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by

combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. Although service-learning may take students to a variety of workplaces, there are some basic principles of professionalism. These include the following:

1. Reliability. Excellent attendance, punctuality, trustworthiness, follow through, commitment, initiative, following instructions, adherence to schedule, respecting confidentiality.
2. Cooperation. Effective teamwork, understanding one's roles and responsibilities as a team member.
3. Attentiveness. Mindfulness of safety, quality, and productivity.
4. Honesty. Truthfulness in all situations.
5. Respect for others. Courtesy, attentive listening, appropriate language, appreciation for diversity.
6. Ambition. Hard working, self-disciplined, self-motivated.
7. Responsibility.
8. Fairness.
9. Flexibility.
10. Willingness to serve.

The outcome is that students who are oriented to the professional world in advance of entering the workforce often experience:

- Smoother transition between school and the workplace
- Greater achievement during service
- Enhanced self-esteem

During the VALUE conference in Turkey in June 2011 intercultural issues were investigated under the following sub-themes: identities, values, communication and language, diffusion and transformation, intercultural education.

The conclusions of the subgroup were:

1. Individuals want to learn parallel to being able to work. Universities need to recognise this. Also there is the need for individualised learning. Volunteering is LLL and this needs to be recognised.

2. ILKYAR groups of volunteers visits Turkish rural villages and make a contribution to help the community develop themselves. They attempt to move away from simply making donations. They stress the need to avoid influencing their culture – as an outsider want to avoid being an intruder in their lives.

3. Students from schools are taken to the university to motivate them to study more. On 12th April there is Turkish national holiday and on that day the best students from schools are invited to the University for a week.

4. The subgroup was discussing: ‘what is the European identity’? What about national identity? For intercultural dialogue there is the need of open dialogue – how do we meet people, address people on volunteering, motivate people? Guidelines are needed to overcome xenophobia and promote diversity. Arts and culture may be the answer to this in promoting an atmosphere of dialogue.

5. What is ‘intercultural’?
 - Diversity
 - Tolerance
 - Richness
 - How cultures are intertwined
 - Transfer/exchange/cultural values
 - There are many difference but we must promote the similarities
 - Culture as a method of solidarity
 - Culture is historical
 - Cultures are influenced by other cultures over time
 - Learning how others live
 - ‘Interculturality as synergetic product of multiple identities’ Conti, 2010

6. Using English language creates hierarchy and inequality but simultaneously English makes it possible to have dialogue and exchange culture.

The sub-group was also identifying and discussing the ULLL good practice which both facilitates and promotes intercultural dialogue. It was also discussed the role of the volunteers in ‘translating’ the culture to another culture. The common conclusion was, that it would be useful to have a kind of handbook for volunteers, how to react and behave in the intercultural environment.

The institutions, being the partners in the sub-group had worked on the handbooks and principles, connected with Lifelong Learning through Volunteering and Intercultural Education, which can be used as good practice:

- The Volunteer Project Manual of ILKYAR (Turkey), which contains important rules and regulations for ILKYAR volunteers and can be used successfully by other volunteering organisations.
- The Handbook for the Mentors of READCOM Reading Clubs, containing the effective methods of intercultural education, which can be used by the volunteer, working with any group of people - prepared by Public Library of Ursus District in Warsaw (Poland)
- “Lifelong Learning through Volunteering : Principles”, the multimedia presentation prepared by Leuphana University of Lüneburg (Germany)

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