

Informal educators work with young people in youth clubs, in youth organisations and movements, in youth information and guidance centres, in free time activities after school; on the streets; during international youth exchanges; in hostels for young people and the young unemployed; across the whole geographical and socio-economic spectrum of Europe. Many of them are volunteers, giving freely of their time because of the importance they attach to such work. Even this list does not cover the whole spectrum of those involved in organising informal youth activities. Indeed, among the most effective providers are young people themselves educating each other. [This approach, known as peer education, is dealt with more specifically in **DOMINO** a publication also produced within the “all different - all equal” campaign.] All of these situations and more provide possibilities for informal intercultural education.

Informal education has several important features which distinguish it from formal education:

- Informal education is voluntary, it does not have the obligatory character of school which sometimes leads pupils to reject approaches or subjects which are a part of the curriculum
- Providers of informal education have to make greater efforts to sustain the interest of participants as the commercial world is very clever in providing attractive alternatives
- In informal education there is a closer relationship with participants, and this makes communication easier (if at times more stressful!)
- The contents are adapted with the participants to their reality and needs
- There is freer choice in the setting of objectives and in matching them with relevant activities
- The active and participative methodology applied in informal education makes for greater participation.

In many respects, of course, informal education could not exist without the presence of formal education and there is much room to improve the compatibility between the two. It may be possible for you to adapt activities contained in Part B for use in schools, but we have directed our energies at their use in informal education with young people. Here we look closer at the bases for these activities.

## **Working With Young People – A Continuous Process**

No matter their age, people who come face to face with the challenges and problems of multicultural society cannot jump straight from ignorance to critical consciousness and action. This may only be carried out through an intercultural education process, informal in this case, alongside which it is possible to carry out a variety of activities and initiatives.

Intercultural education has to enable young people to discover the origins and mechanisms of racism, intolerance, xenophobia and anti-semitism. Personal discovery can lead to collective action and it is up to us to facilitate this process. Political and eco-

conomic action is also required to complete the picture: education has its limits but also its responsibilities.

Others have attempted to describe the crucial areas for consideration in planning programmes for intercultural education, as you can see in the resources section at the end of this pack. We have chosen, in a simplified way, to compare the intercultural education process to a road in which there are different stages that, simultaneously, are centres of interest to work on.

These are:

- i) To imagine yourself from the outside
- ii) To understand the world we live in
- iii) To be acquainted with other realities
- iv) To see difference positively
- v) To favour positive attitudes, values and behaviour

You may decide that some stages are more important than others, or that you need to take a different route altogether. These stages may be combined in different orders but, as this pack is not four-dimensional, we will take them one by one – including suggested ideas and contents to work with.

### ***i) To imagine yourself from the outside***

In intercultural education the starting point of our work is to reflect upon ourselves and our own reality.

*Ideas and contents:*

#### **Our own social and cultural reality:**

- To re-assess what we feel is positive and what is negative within our reality.
- Our habits, ways of thought, styles of life, etc. are only one possible response to the world: there are other realities, which are neither better nor worse, but different.
- Explaining our reality to others who do not know it can be useful in helping us to gain a different perspective.

#### **Reactions to other social and cultural realities with which we live:**

- Prejudices and stereotypes within our society toward other societies and cultures.
- Why do those prejudices and stereotypes appear?
- Why are there some positive prejudices and stereotypes and some other negative ones?
- The influence of prejudices and stereotypes on our way of behaving towards other people.

#### **Discrimination: An arbitrary phenomenon:**

- Everyone may be discriminated against on some occasion or other.
- Why does discrimination take place?
- What forms does it take?

### **ii) To understand the world we live in**

Different societies, countries or states cannot develop if they are isolated from one another.

*Ideas and contents:*

#### **We live in an interdependent world:**

- Societies are in need of each other.
- Europe is not a planet! (the slogan taken from the Council of Europe's North-South Centre)

#### **Shared responsibility:**

- In great part, the forces that oblige many people to leave their countries in order to survive originate in the economic system our ways of life are based upon.

As a complement to realising that we live in an interdependent world, we need to be working on our responses to the phenomenon of globalisation these days. An investigation into the causes and effects is contained in the **Compass chapter** on **Globalisation**.

### **iii) To be acquainted with other realities**

Many of the negative attitudes towards cultures, lifestyles or societies which are different to our own, have their origin in the “fear of the unknown”. That is why an essential element in intercultural education is encouraging acquaintance with and knowledge of other cultures - not that of the tourist who keeps a safe distance, but one which allows us to open up to the risks of encounter and exchange. This acquaintance must be based on the effort to understand realities different to our own.

*Ideas and contents:*

#### **What do we know about other cultures or lifestyles?:**

- How have we obtained the information we possess about other cultures, societies, countries?
- How much of reality is there in that knowledge, and how many preconceived thoughts reach us by different ways?
- How much do we need to question the information and images we receive through the mass media?
- How can we really find out what it is like to “walk in someone else's shoes”?

#### **There are neither superior nor inferior cultures:**

- Each culture is the result of a different reality.
- In each culture there are positive aspects from which it is possible to learn, and negative aspects we may criticise - how do we decide?

#### **Different does not mean worse, but dissimilar:**

- Which are the factors by which the difference between human beings is seen as something negative?

#### **iv) To see difference positively**

What are the bases of being able to look at difference from a positive perspective?

*Ideas and contents:*

##### **Our own culture is a mixture of differences:**

- The social and cultural reality we belong to is the result of a conglomeration of differences.
- We do not consider those differences to be an overwhelming obstacle to living together.

##### **The difference among different cultures is a positive fact:**

- The connections and relations between different cultures are enriching not only for individuals but also for societies. They can also be the sources of great amusement and pleasure.
- Every society and culture has something to learn from and something to teach to other societies.
- How do we learn to avoid making immediate judgements about facets of other cultures or lifestyles which are “strange” to us?
- How can we learn to live with the feelings of (temporary) insecurity, which these processes awaken in us?
- How do we take advantage of the enormous opportunities such encounters give us to find out new sides to our identities?

#### **v) To favour positive attitudes, values and behaviour**

All of these stages are based on the promotion of values: human rights, recognition, acceptance, active tolerance, respect, peaceful conflict resolution and solidarity.

- If we claim the right to solidarity then, as Jean-Marie Bergeret summarises, we also have an obligation to show solidarity. It is this type of conclusion we are working towards in intercultural education. But young people will only change their attitudes and conclusions for themselves, we can only help to facilitate the process by working through a variety of challenges with them over time.
- If we work to favour these sorts of attitudes it will be easier to encourage positive behaviour toward people from other cultures. But we have to take into consideration that these attitudes and behaviours are not possible if they are not developed parallel to qualities like honesty, cooperation, communication, critical thought and organisation.

## **Pause for Thought**

Intercultural education is not a closed program that may be repeated without continuous modifications. On the contrary, not only is the range of possible intercultural activities very wide, but we also have to question continuously what we are doing and why. It is impossible to buy a magic formula that can guarantee us success.