Intercultural Dialogue: Why we need it in our classrooms

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Globalization has changed the way the world operates. The world is changing at a very fast pace and globalized societies have made effective cross-cultural communication more important than ever. These changes have provided many opportunities, and challenges and to respond constructively to the changes of the 21st century, students need to be equipped to understand, critique and transform the social and cultural conditions they live in. This calls for a transformation in education focused on developing skills for multicultural understanding. The aim of such a transformative intervention is to enable the learners' understanding to transition from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative stance (Deardorff, 2009).

UNESCO defines intercultural dialogue as the "equitable exchange and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based on mutual understanding and respect". It is said that intercultural dialogue "is the essential prerequisite for constructing social cohesion and reconciliation among peoples and peace among nations." There is a growing recognition of the capacity of intercultural dialogue to address a host of key development and security concerns. In a recent UNESCO(UNESCO Intercultural Dialogue Section et al., 2018) survey, 68% of Member States and Associate Members identified intercultural dialogue as a high priority area and one where UNESCO should capitalize on its multidisciplinary expertise. Given current political and social tensions and conflict between people of varying ethnic and cultural groups, well planned intercultural dialogue offers a concrete strategy to ensure the next generation is prepared to navigate the world we live in.

With the advent of new technologies, it is now possible to connect with people across the globe instantly. Education institutions across the globe are now harnessing the potential of technology to connect with each other and help students acquire key skills of collaboration, perspective taking and appreciating differences. This has the potential to act as a catalyst while facilitating intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution. Online intercultural dialogue is a fairly new topic within the field of education. There are many components: intercultural and global competence, online learning, and dialogue as a pedagogical tool are the main three. Much research has been done about each one of these learning components individually, but when compiled together, we

still know very little about best practices. Kreijns, Kirschner, and Jochems (2003) identify the importance of including the social dimensions of trust, sense of belongingness, and respect, in online collaborative settings to foster intercultural interactions.

First it is important to define what intercultural competence is. Renowned professor and researcher , Martyn Barrett defines it as "*the set of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding that are needed for understanding and respecting people who are perceived to be culturally different from oneself, for interacting and communicating effectively and appropriately with such people, and for establishing positive and constructive relationships with such people*" (Barrett, 2018). In many schools around the world, there has been a recognition that students need intercultural competence, and there are many ways in which to cultivate it.

Values	Valuing human dignity and human rights Valuing cultural diversity
Attitudes	Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, worldviews and practices Respect for other people and for other beliefs, worldviews and practices Self-efficacy Tolerance of ambiguity
Skills	Analytical and critical thinking skills Listening and observing Empathy Flexibility and adaptability Linguistic, communicative, and plurilingual skills
Knowledge and Critical Understanding	Knowledge and critical understanding of the self Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication Knowledge and critical understanding of culture, cultures and religions

This table was adapted from Barrett, M. (2018). How Schools Can Promote the Intercultural Competence of Young People. *European Psychologist.*

As per Deardorff (2009), the conceptualisation of the term "intercultural competence" (has evolved over time, through the formation of different, not necessarily mutually exclusive, models namely Compositional, Co-orientational, Development, Adaptational, and Causal Process Models. One of the most common ways to develop intercultural competence, as displayed in the Table above, is through intercultural relationships.

However, in many educational settings, the school's population might be somewhat homogenous. In these cases, it is recommended that students be provided with study abroad opportunities or engage in conversations through online mediums. According to Popov, Biemans, Kuznetov, and Mulder (2014, p. 350), conversations in online collaborative settings in culturally diverse learner groups, can be fostered using an interculturally enriched collaborative script (IECS). They define an

IECS as "a collaboration script that serves to structure a group's interaction, coordinate learning activities and articulate culture-related differences in perspectives and behaviour." In their study, Popov et al. (2014) explore the impacts of the IECS on the participants' interactions, and their problem solving skills in a group. Another setting while studying abroad has been linked to many positive outcomes for learning in general, and promoting intercultural competence, it is expensive and not readily available to the majority of communities. This is where schools can innovate their online and technological practices to provide opportunities for interactions across cultures.

Although there are reports of how challenging intercultural dialogue is, or how it has resulted in discomfort, it does not mean schools should avoid it. Even for people who feel comfortable navigating cross-cultural communication, difficulties can occur. What matters in these cases is how a person proceeds and reflects on the situation afterwards. Barrett (2018) outlines the importance of teachers if these situations arise in a classroom, "if communication becomes difficult or breaks down, there is the opportunity for discussions with the teacher about what went wrong, what unintended messages might have damaged the communication, and how future communications can be conducted in a more intercultural sensitive manner." This can be especially important for online intercultural dialogue, as messages can be misconstrued easily when communicating from afar. However, teachers and facilitators can prepare themselves and their students to navigate, reflect, and grow from these situations.

Since various studies on intercultural dialogue to promote intercultural competence present conflicting data, it is clear that more comprehensive studies need to be done in this area.

With the ever-changing patterns of intercultural interactions at the global level, and the advent of technological development, it has become crucial to design transformative educational experiences and furthering the discourses around peacebuilding. Such experiences demand an understanding rooted in intercultural competence, its conceptualization and dialogue. In order to inform better practices in the domain of transformative learning and intercultural exchange, the role of critical research has been highlighted as important. The three important character traits of a digital intercultural pedagogical design framework, namely intercultural and global competence, online learning, and dialogue, have the potential to drive peacebuilding and transformational learning initiatives.

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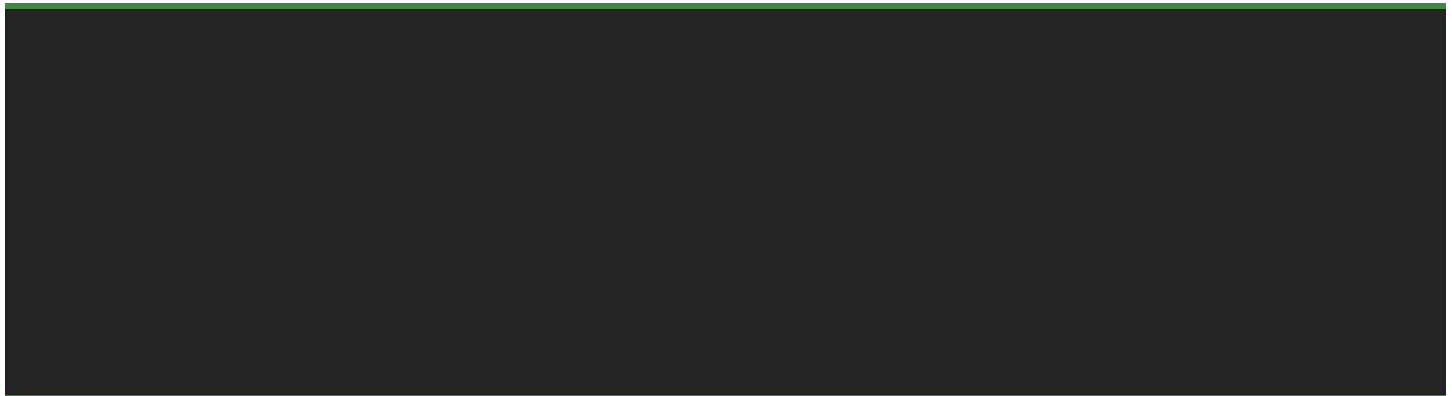
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