

Pedagogical Strategies in Multicultural Classes. Laying the Groundwork

Intellectual Output 2, Unit II



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1. Theoretical Background READINGS – Pedagogical logic behind GCE approach to religions. Basic ethical and methodological principles

Unit 1 is a “meta module” laying the groundwork for the other Units in terms of creating a learning and teaching environment which is conducive to exploring inter-religious issues. Classes are becoming increasingly heterogeneous across Europe in terms of learning approaches, abilities, cultures, faiths, etc. and there is a need on the one hand for teachers to feel better equipped to deal with the challenging dynamics in their classes and on the other hand for students to feel accepted, supported and valued in terms of their learning and identity. A multicultural class does not only imply students coming from different cultures but, also students who have different backgrounds and identities. This suggests that the majority of classes today are multicultural. Conflicts, discriminatory attitudes and behaviour in the classroom are often the by-products of contrasting identities, which lack understanding and/or reciprocal respect and which are badly managed. Stereotypes and prejudice that snowball easily into discrimination are often fuelled by media and society who tend to use the most vulnerable in society and/or minority groups to scapegoat their own fears, which are rooted in little or no understanding of the “other” (religion, tradition, sexual orientation, etc.). The rate at which classes and schools are changing is far ahead of the pace of evolving pedagogical strategies and teacher training. It would therefore be extremely useful to propose Unit 1 not only to SORAPS teachers but to all those who are struggling to teach a class in which prejudice, conflicts and discrimination are part of the everyday.

Unit 1 is structured as follows:

- 1. Aims:**
 - To support teachers to identify and manage conflicts and discrimination and prejudice in the classroom;
 - To create and foster a learning environment that can recognise and give value to diversity (cultural, religious, etc.);
 - To introduce active and participatory methods that can foster cooperative learning, open mindedness, critical analysis, etc.

- 2. Methods:**

The non-formal teaching/active and participatory methods proposed are “tools” which teachers can subsequently use when examining all the Units. They are methods, which can complement frontal lessons and can be adapted to any issue (Christianity, fundamentalism, prejudice, etc.) Detailed information about the main NFE methods.

2. Class Needs Assessment Assignments READINGS/COMPULSORY ACTIVITIES

The teacher carries out a series of activities using active and participatory methodologies (role playing, brainstorming, group work, etc.) which address: identifying differences as a way to address and overcome conflicts, misunderstandings and prejudice. In the second part of this session, the teacher examines with the class how diversity is an asset.

1. Time: Each session will last 2 hours (this is very ambitious but we are aware that teachers time is limited). The first session is for teachers only, so there will be 4 hours of class time needed for Module Zero.
2. Materials: Materials and a step-by-step procedure to deliver the lesson are described below.

Session 1: The observation process

The teacher is given a baseline questionnaire and activities to assess and observe his/her class, identifying learning difficulties, tensions and conflicts between students, negative (e.g. racist, homophobic, Islamophobic) behaviour. This session is for the teacher only. It would be largely recommendable for a teacher to work together with a colleague/s who know/s the same class in order to have different perspectives.

The questionnaire is carried out over two weeks, allowing the teacher to reflect between observations.

Week 1: Please answer/carry out the following questions and tasks:

1. How would you describe the general climate in the class in terms of:

- a) friendships and respect between peers
- b) feeling of belonging to a class
- c) having a constructive attitude
- d) relationship with teacher/s
- e) willingness to learn
- f) ability to learn
- g) tensions and conflicts
- h) difficulties and challenges

2. Please identify a min of 6 and max of 10 students who have different and significant characters in terms of their attitude and behaviour and describe them using the same points (a-h) as above.

Example: Student 1. How would you describe the student in terms of his/her a) friendships and respect between peers b) feeling of belonging to a class c) having a constructive attitude d) relationship with teacher/s e) willingness to learn f) ability to learn g) tensions and conflicts h) difficulties and challenges.

The same task of observation is carried out with the other students.

- 1 What are the key learning difficulties in the class?
- 2 What are the reasons for these difficulties?
- 3 What are the main tensions and conflicts between students?
- 4 What are the root causes for these tensions and conflicts?
- 5 How would you describe the negative behaviour in the class (if it exists)?
- 6 What fuels this negative behaviour?
- 7 What has struck you most carrying out this observation?

Week 2: please repeat the same observation process as week 1. Are there any significant changes? If so, why?

Session 2: *Identifying differences as a way to address and overcome conflicts, misunderstandings and prejudice*

Time: 1 hour

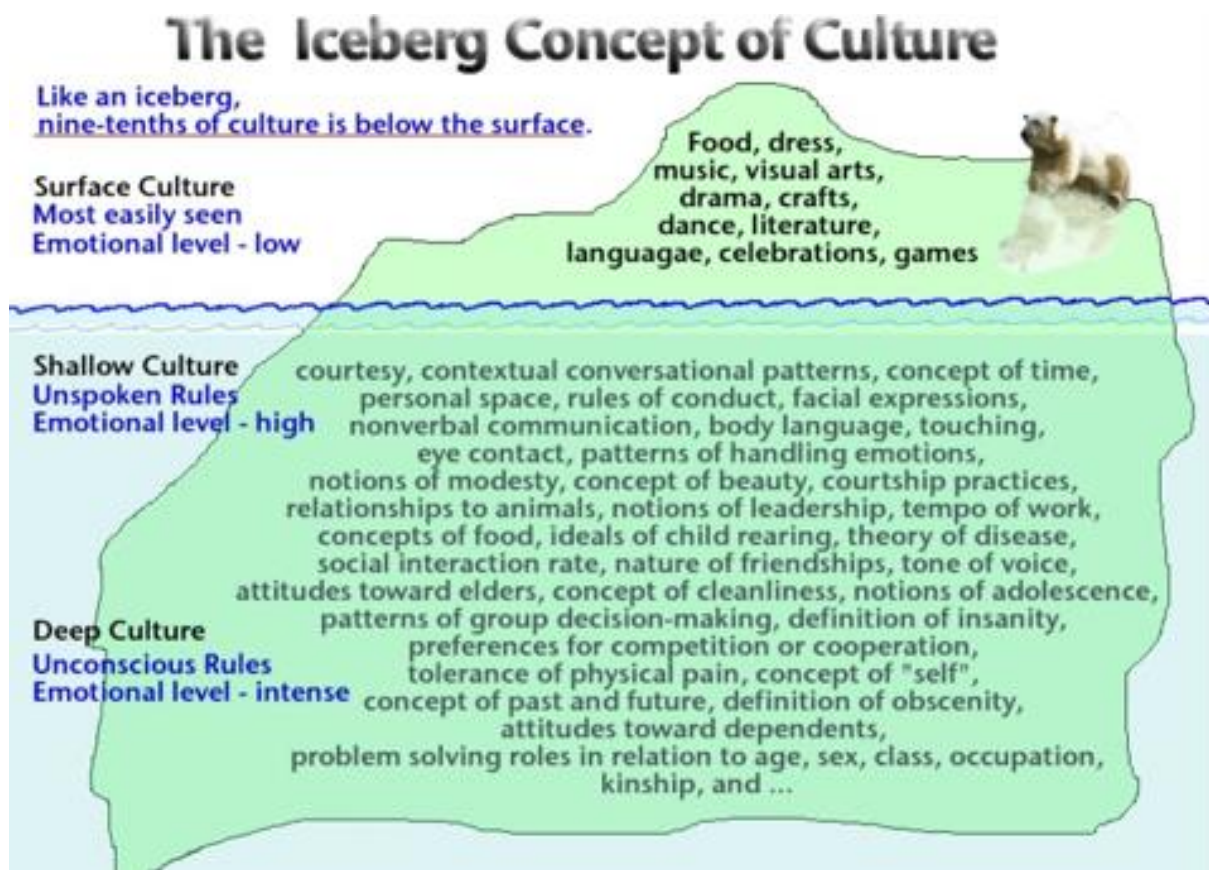
Materials needed: A2 or bigger pieces of paper for each student, scissors, glue, lots of magazines and newspapers (important to have a mix of magazine types so as to offer a wide range of representations from real life)

Description: Each student is asked to prepare an A2 page (ideally even bigger than A2) which depicts what they like and dislike through a collage made up of images from magazines and newspapers. The students share their presentations and try to identify differences (also trying to understand the reasons for these differences) and similarities between them. Each student sits with one classmate with whom he/she has something in common and at least two classmates with whom there are great differences and they ask each other questions to understand the reasons for their differences.

In plenary, the class discusses (unexpected) similarities and differences: are there any reasons for these differences? (different tastes, e.g. music, clothes, etc., different interests, different backgrounds, cultures?)

Debriefing: The teacher asks the class the following questions to guide the debriefing session:

1. What happened/what did you do? (describing the facts); How did you react?
2. How did you feel and what impact did it have on you? What surprised you the most when talking to your class mates? What do you think are the causes for our differences and are similarities? Do you think it's a problem if we are different or the same?
3. What did you learn from this? How can I improve myself through this experience?



(picture taken from google images)

3. Activities in Class READINGS/OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES – not necessarily related to religions, multicultural activities

Session 1: T.E.A.M. Together Everyone Achieves More

Time: 1 hour

Materials needed: Large flip chart size papers (approx. 3), post its, coloured pens

Description: The teacher pairs up students, trying to put together students who don't usually work together/like each other. Each student is asked to identify different skills that his/her classmate has (e.g. good at drawing, languages, debating, sports etc.). The pair then sit together and show each other their list. They can discuss their choices and change them and add to them if they wish. Each student should have a list of minimum three skills belonging to his/her classmate.

The class is then given a "mission impossible" to do. They have to plan a day at school with no lessons but packed with other, interesting activities which will be appealing to all students. They can call in local associations who carry out sports, different types of hobbies, local community members, parents, etc. The class has 30 min to plan the mission impossible, thinking of how to structure the day. Each student should try to contribute using the skills which they have identified, e.g. if a student is good at drawing then he/she could design the poster to promote the day, if a student is good at languages he/she could organize a screening of a film/cartoon/documentary in another language etc. The class works together using large flip chart size papers as well as post it notes to add their ideas. The class should plan the alternative day at school on the large sheets of paper. There should be a list of things to do, what is needed and who will do what. No student can be left without a job to do.

After approx. 40 min the teacher stops the activity and leads a discussion about how diversity is an asset based on a debriefing, following these questions:

1. What happened/what did you do? (describing the facts); How did you organise and distribute the work to do? How did you react?
2. How did you feel and what impact did it have on you? Did you feel that you could contribute with the skills you have? If not, why not?
3. What did you learn from this (about diversity being as asset)? How can I and the class better myself/itself through this experience?

Session 2: The Crocodile

Team building exercise in which a group is challenged to physically support one another in an endeavour to move from one end of a space to another. It requires working together creatively and strategically in order to solve a practical, physical problem. It tends to emphasize group communication, cooperation, leadership and membership, patience and problem-solving.

Materials needed: For this exercise you need a large room or preferably an outdoor space (grass is ideal). About 15 – 25 meters long, depending on the number of participants (about

1-1.5 meters per participant – if more than 15, count 1 meter and, if less than 15, 1.5 meters) and about 6-8 meters wide.

- Cards, 1 per participant (about 20x10cm and a thickness of about 2-3 cm – to be magic stones)
- Two ropes/long strings about 6-8 meters long (to mark the banks of the river)
- A roll of tape, tennis ball or other similar-sized object (to be used as an oxygen mask)

Description: Prepare the challenge by putting out the ropes marking the banks of the river. Pile the cards on one of the banks. There should be as many cards as participants, minus one. With groups of 20 or more, create two teams, one on each bank of the river, crossing in opposite directions.

Assemble all participants on the bank where the cards are (these cards represent magic stones). Tell them that they may not yet touch the cards. Explain that they are about to undertake a challenge and must listen closely to the instructions.

The teacher gives the following instructions: “For this challenge you need your problem-solving and collaboration skills. You are a team on an expedition deep in the jungle, when suddenly there is a big forest fire. Trying to escape the fire, you have reached a wide river that you must cross with the whole team in order to survive. In the river there are very aggressive crocodiles. Get too close and you’re finished. But fortunately you have discovered a set of magic stones laying on the bank. This is the only support you can use in order to cross from one side to the other. The magic stones float on the water as long as there is constant body contact. As soon as body contact is lost, when a stone is in the water, it sinks and disappears. If someone puts a hand in the water, the crocodiles will immediately bite it off – the same with feet.”

Demonstrate by putting a stone in the water and put your fingers on the stone and put your foot on the stone and then take away the fingers. Show that when a stone has no body contact, it sinks. Show that if a hand or foot touches the ground, it gets bitten off and must be held behind the back.

“If someone falls in the water the person is eaten and the challenge is over” (if this happens quite early in the challenge you can ask the group if they want another try).

“Your task is solved successfully when everyone is on the other side of the river alive. Any questions before you start?”

This is their final chance to get clarification. Ensure that the rules are clear but do not answer any questions about how the challenge should be solved. Once the explanation is over, the teacher(s) become the sharks. Move around the space watching the group closely. When a stone is left without body contact, remove it from play (it has “sunk.”) When students accidentally touch the ground with hands or feet, tell them that the limb has been “bitten off” and that they must continue without using it.

The group will somehow establish a plan and then begin moving across the river. Different groups take different approaches ranging from highly structured to extremely chaotic.

If the group seems to be succeeding at the challenge relatively easily, consider introducing the “oxygen mask” Tell the group that the big fire is getting closer and there is a lack of oxygen. All participants both in the water and standing on the bank need to breathe through the “oxygen mask” (a roll of tape) at least every minute. Thus, they must pass the mask constantly, ensuring that each member gets it. This pushes the group to include everyone and get out of the water as a full team. It can also be used as a mechanism to raise the stress level in the group.

Let the group continue until they succeed in getting all members to the other side. If a member falls into the water then the group fails and must start over from the beginning.

Debriefing: Once the group has succeeded at the challenge, the teacher debriefs by reflecting on how the group worked together. Use questions such as:

- What happened during the task?
- How did you work as a group?
- How did the experience make you feel?
- How did you behave/respond/react?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about groups?
- How does this activity help the class?

Session 3: Learning styles and multiple intelligences

Materials needed: Watch in class the video of Howard Gardner [8 Intelligences – Theory of Multiple Intelligences Explained](#)

Students can individually take the test [“What is your learning style?”](#)

A discussion is then lead by the teacher about different intelligences. The teacher stimulates a discussion using questions such as:

- Did you know that there are different types of intelligence?
- How do you feel now that you have recognized yours?
- Do you think that schools recognize different types of intelligence and learning styles? If not, what does this cause? (learning difficulties) How does it make you feel?
- Do you feel that your family and/or friends recognize your intelligence? If not, what does this cause? How does it make you feel?
- What could be done by you, by schools and by your family and friends to help respect different forms of intelligence?

Sessions 2 and 3 are not completely disconnected from the Inter-religious Education as reference can be made to some of the themes but they will generally focus on activities which will facilitate students to look at, discuss and overcome differences as negative aspects, as well as to create a respectful and conducive learning environment in which the Units can be

carried out. It is highly recommended that teachers carry out the observation process throughout the project, so to monitor any possible change and especially at the end, to assess whether the project has initiated a change process in terms of resolving or better managing conflicts in the class and fostering tolerance and respect.