

Intercultural Dialogue

If every student, whatever subject s/he is studying or at whatever level, from undergraduate to PhD and post-doc, will engage in thinking about the context in which they are learning we might be well make progress with Intercultural Dialogue. We might aim to produce graduates who are:

- Critical and creative thinkers
- Ambitious – but also idealistic and committed to ethical behaviour
- Entrepreneurs with the ability to innovate
- Highly employable and ready to embrace professional mobility
- Willing to assume leadership roles: in the family, the community and the world place
- Sensitive to cultural difference and willing and able to be informed and inhabited by an understanding of cultural difference

In other words, we might aim to produce a new and special kind of student: aware of the challenges of the world in which we live and recognise that many new opportunities exist in our complex and globalised world. They will seek to make a difference, no matter how small, to the communities in which they live. The most difficult goal is to be able to live authentically in and with cultural difference.

Within study cultural difference needs to be understood and respected . We need to understand and mobilise methodological difference, since the ways in which subjects are learned and researched in different countries are culturally specific and we need to comprehend how these methodological differences can be brought together more effectively.

The issue of intercultural dialogue is also intricately bound up with the issue of tolerance and freedom of speech. Rather, it is a process: a process of active, involved tolerance, whereby we must constantly strive to accept sometimes significant (and even shocking differences in the way that other people view and live in the world). Active tolerance is a key as we seek to become creative and responsible global citizens.

To engage in cultural dialogue means that we need to learn to listen and hear with a different ear, as it were, being always aware that what is being said comes from a different place and needs to be heard in an enquiring way, rather than assuming that we understand immediately what it means.

It can be argued that intercultural dialogue also brings us to new understandings of our individual and collective responsibilities as global citizens. By recognising the importance of maintaining difference **as difference**, we learn to take more time over conversation and discussion. Intercultural dialogue takes longer and is slower in the moments of the dialogic encounter. Yet in this slower form of communication, we discover more about ourselves and more about the other. The dialogue becomes a meaningful experience in itself rather than being simply a means to an end.

Understanding better how differences can actually lead to a sense of oneness, which is never stable or static, leads to a greater sense of belonging and being in the world.

The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, argued that you can only say 'the same' if you think 'different'; and you can only say 'different' if you think 'the same'. This apparently simple statement is profound and seems to be at the heart of what intercultural dialogue is and can be. We can only understand that we are like a human being in different circumstances if we understand just how different s/he is, and we can only understand how different we are by recognising the bonds of sameness that link us together. Better understanding and better living out of such dynamic inter-connectivity can enable us better and more effectively to be global citizens and better participants in intercultural dialogues.

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