FOREWORD

Milton J. Bennett

Since my work figures into some of the discussions included in this volume, I am pleased to have the opportunity to add this short foreword to the book. In general, using (or perhaps abusing) the terminology of some of its authors, the I-VET project seems to me to be an excellent example of reflexive post-modern education. Such education is necessarily about the educators as much as it is about the students, since they owe their existence to each other. Such education is necessarily contextual, since recognition of elemental diversity is the great departure from modernity. And such education is necessarily constructive, since its very goal is the exercise of self-reflexive consciousness.

Let me explore these propositions one by one. In the traditional terms of a positivist paradigm, education is the process of becoming fit for modern society. There is knowledge that the students need to know, which are those things that have been discovered and consolidated into categories. There are attitudes to be conveyed, which are those feelings that foster development along the assumed trajectory of modernity. And there are skills to be acquired, which is that behaviour that fulfils and reinforces the Gesellschaft roles of modern society. In my observation, this positivist approach to education is still the norm, leading our schools to be more and more disconnected from the post-modern world.

A more relevant approach to education is to affirm the "learning relationship" between teacher and student. The I-VET project is laudable in its focus on this aspect of education. Of course, this is an old idea, finding form in various historical examples of master/apprentice. The new twist is that what the student needs to learn and what the teacher has to teach are now intertwined. By demanding that teachers be relevant, students require that their masters apprentice themselves to newly defined knowledge. Reciprocally, teachers expect that students know the classics of their field of study before

improvising new ideas. In this way, education becomes a co-ontological process rather than a mix of one-way demands and impositions.

It is easy to see co-ontological education in action around multicultural issues. Teachers are usually not accustomed to dealing with multicultural classrooms, so they tend to use unmodified traditional teaching methods. Increasingly, however, parents and students themselves are demanding that schools take into account new cultural mixes and teachers are feeling the pressure. One overly simplistic answer to this demand is to "celebrate diversity" with displays of travel posters, artefacts, music, and cuisine. While most obviously this approach is biased toward the particularly visible cultures of nationality and ethnicity, it is also fundamentally misguided. The call of interculturality is not to simply recognize cultural difference, although that is a good starting point. Not is it sufficient for teachers to become less prejudiced and more tolerant of diverse groups, although that also is a good idea. Interculturality demands nothing less than a de-standardization of the curriculum and teaching processes. By "de-standardization" I don't mean that teachers should "throw out the classics" or "lower their standards," or "teach just what the students want," or any of the other common excuses for not dealing with diversity. Rather, I mean that the modernist uniformity of method and content that has been rationalized by real and idealized assimilation into nation-state cultures is now obsolete. The melting pot is dead, and it is time to find methods more suitable for the mixed salad. To follow the food metaphor, the integrity of each ingredient needs to be preserved while each is also integrated into the whole dish. As any cook will tell you, the process for doing this is more subtle and demanding than just throwing everything into a single pot. The parallel for schools is that they should not add "attending to diversity" to the same old pot, nor should teachers simply introduce some intercultural training exercises into their pedagogy. Rather, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders need to co-operate in designing a new kind of educational dish, one that can be cooked to order in reasonably efficient ways.

Turning now to the idea that multicultural education is necessarily contextual, we arrive at more or less the prevailing paradigm. The great movement of cultural relativism that continues to challenge hierarchical notions of civilization is based on the idea that cultures must be understood in their own contexts, not in terms of transcendent values or teleological arcs. Mainstream though it is in pedagogical circles, this post-modern assumption is still very problematic at the delivery end of education. One problem in implementing the new paradigm is what I have called "paradigmatic confusion". Such confusion occurs when the goal of an activity is stated on one paradigm but the methods associated with its implementation are lodged in a different one. For instance, the educational goal of "cultural awareness", or "respect for diversity" clearly resides in contextual (cultural) relativism. However, the methods

for achieving the goal are often derived from a positivist paradigm, thus generating the confusion.

The primary culprit in paradigmatic confusion is the ubiquitous KAS – knowledge, attitude, and skills. First of all, KAS confuses two levels of analysis – the individual and the group. Knowledge, attitudes, and skills all exist <u>within individuals</u>, yet the consequences of their development in individuals are claimed at an interactional or group level – e.g. improved intercultural communication, or an improved climate of respect for diversity. While the I-VET project makes a clear case for embedding intercultural competence in social interaction, it nevertheless uses KAS in describing its pedagogical methodology. (Most other intercultural programs do the same thing, unfortunately, often without even attempting to define competence in interactional terms.) An example of this kind of paradigmatic confusion occurs when international area studies, ethnic studies, gender studies, queer studies, and other such domains claim that learning about the groups in which they specialize is itself a development of cultural awareness. Actually, such knowledge contributes to greater differentiation of the cultural group, but it doesn't contribute directly to awareness of the group as a cultural context. Were it to be true that knowledge about a particular culture caused an appreciation of cultural context, diplomatic corps would be hotbeds of cultural relativity, and many of the business people who have been exposed to one of the systems of "cultural dimensions" would be great appreciators of diversity. Actually, as it is presented persuasively in this volume, cultural relativity is a matter of defining and reflecting on one's own cultural context first of all, then acquiring appropriate "value-neutral" tools for comparing contexts. In developing relativistic cultural awareness, knowledge about specific cultural groups is useful as a tertiary activity at best.

Another paradigmatic confusion occurs when attempts to change attitudes are conducted with the goal of creating more respect for diversity. These efforts – sometimes called prejudice reduction or anti-racism (sexism, etc.) programs – are often positivist in their activities, assuming that prejudicial attitudes cause ignorance and/or disrespect, and therefore a change in attitude will cause a change in cultural awareness. In some cases, the causality of this relationship is expressed in transformational terms such as, "disintegration precedes reintegration". While the idea of transformation can be used in constructivist ways, it often masks a more positivist methodology for creating systemic (relativistic) change, thus creating paradigmatic confusion. And finally, interculturalists themselves are responsible for a much of the paradigmatic confusion associated with skills development. Whenever we present a list of do's and don'ts for success in some other culture, or when we just imply that learning behavior is the key to intercultural competence, we are making a simplified causal assumption that conflicts with the interactional outcome of cultural

awareness. Skills do not cause competence. At best, appropriate behavioral skills are an enactment or manifestation of intercultural communication competence. The root of competence does not lie in KAS; it resides in the ability to experience the world differently.

An important objection to cultural relativity is related to the conflation of cultural and ethical relativity. Some parents and, more often, self-appointed moral guardians object to what they see as the "moral relativism" implied by cultural context. Whether it is a cynical tactic or a sincere tenet, the charge is used to stop schools from introducing substantial intercultural content and methods. The I-VET program correctly notes that dealing with intercultural ethicality should be a major concern of teacher development. Teachers need to talk about ethics in developmental ways. If ethicality is left in its default condition, it almost certainly refers to a set of absolute principles derived from religious or family dictates, and these kinds of principles severely limit the relativity of context. Absolute principles are necessarily related to positivist epistemology, and so their very existence obviates relativity. The idea of "universal" or "transcultural" values based on cross-cultural research does not change the essentially dualistic nature of the proposed values. For cultural relativism to even be comprehended, it needs to be coupled with more sophisticated forms of ethicality based on conscious commitment rather than received conviction.

The essential act of consciousness in relativity is self-reflection – the ability to perceive ourselves in context relative to others. Yet this ability begs the question, "so what?" Is the purpose of intercultural education simply to create a climate of respect for diversity? While that certainly is one outcome, I think that intercultural education has a more substantial purpose: the development of intercultural consciousness. That purpose is necessarily and firmly rooted in constructivism, where the essential act of consciousness is self-reflexivity – the ability to intentionally organize our perception in alternative ways and thus to experience different realities.

The interim developmental position developed in the I-VET program is that of constructing intercultural communication competence. This is, indeed, a necessary step, and it demands that educators use a constructivist epistemology to facilitate it. The educators themselves need to be sufficiently self-reflexive to construct appropriate interactional contexts and to adapt their communication to those contexts in ways that are authentic, relevant, and effective. Authentic, in that their educational goals should not be compromised in the process; relevant, in that the goals must be sufficiently general to allow various viable implementations; and effective in that the process is successful in accomplishing the goals in a variety of cultural contexts. Once educators have mastered this operation of self-reflexivity, they are ready to facilitate students in approaching it. Like the teachers, students will be at various levels of "readiness" to engage constructivist epistemology, and part of educational fa-

cilitation is to recognize that. Eventually, the result of exercising self-reflexive intercultural communication competence will be mutual adaptation – an intentional co-ontological state.

Looking beyond this already ambitious program, I think the next step of intercultural development is toward more profound exercises of self-reflexive consciousness – what I have referred to my work as Integration. Here are some forms that could take:

- **Ethical commitment is taught as a necessary and normal part of developing intercultural sensitivity/competence. Currently, reactionary forces opposed to cultural relativity are successfully re-establishing ethical dualism as the only acceptable guide to behavior. As an alternative to this return to ethnocentrism, we need to establish constructive ethical commitment as a viable guide for ethnorelative behavior.**
- **Administrative and executive decisions are routinely scanned for cultural bias and lack of intercultural flexibility. In my casual observation, about half of policies and procedures are unnecessarily ethnocentric, meaning that they are simply impositions of familiar processes that don't serve any cross-cultural coordinating function. Many of these processes could simply be dropped, creating a lot of good will. Others could be modified to be more interculturally flexible.**
- **Cultural difference is taken for granted in societies and organizations, where it is treated as a potential asset. This is probably the single most powerful factor for incorporating intercultural communication into all institutions of society, including education. If something has value, it will be sought, protected, and developed. We should be developing intercultural communication competence not because it is right, or even because it is effective, but because it is the only way to derive the immense value of social diversity.**

Intercultural Development Research Institute,
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Introduction

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The aim of this book is to systematize in a coherent epistemic framework the results achieved during a European LLP Leonardo Transfer of Innovation Project named I-VET-Fostering Intercultural competence in VET teachers and trainers. Through intensive research in the field of lifelong learning, the transfer of an innovative pattern of intercultural education based on an interdisciplinary and inter-professional perspective was carried out in a new operational context, that of on-the-job vocational education and training.

In particular, this book traces the broad, multidisciplinary vision underlying the epistemological framework encompassing the cultural achievements of the I-VET project, and the innovative methodology underpinning the didactic choices piloted in it. I-VET's main purpose is to strengthen intercultural competences in VET practitioners, that is teachers and trainers called upon to cope with increasing forms of diversity in their daily professional lives, and to implement appropriate intercultural dynamics aimed at facilitating the social and cultural integration of people from different backgrounds. Led by an international consortium of European institutions (Universities, Higher Vocational Education Institutions, Foundations), I-VET aims at improving the quality of the VET system in accordance with European standards, by constructing a permanent transnational and multi-sectorial network of institutions and stakeholders active in trainers' initial and lifelong learning on a regional, national and international scale[1]. The focus on the learning needs of VET teachers and trainers arises from

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[1] The I-VET Leonardo Transfer of Innovation Project Consortium is a partnership between four European Univeristies, namely Italian University of Switzerland, University of Aosta Valley, Semmelweis University in Budapest, Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir; four professional Universities, namely Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (international coordinator of the project), University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland, Artevelde University College in Gent, Metropolia University of Applied Science in Helsinki, one private German company involved in vocational training (Bildungsmarkt) and the Swiss Foundation ECAP, a non-profit institution for training and research in the field of adult education.

an increasing awareness of emerging social needs in today's society. Such an awareness is in turn, the result of a multidisciplinary analysis of topical issues dealt with by the Project, ranging from a sociological reading of the new paradigm of trans-national migration implying new forms of super-diversity, cultural integration and professional competency in ever-changing societies, to a new understanding of identity and citizenship developed by Political Science, to the visual ethnographic approach to different urban settings used in Anthropology, to the centrality of experience as a source for learning theorized by Andragogy. It is a broad approach combining different disciplinary perspectives, thus explaining the holistic element assumed by the definition of intercultural competency developed in the I-VET project.

The I-VET Project involves the transfer of an innovative learning model developed in a previous LLP Intensive Program (the Interdisciplinary Course on Intercultural Competences – ICIC, addressed to undergraduate students in Education, Health-Care and Social Work[2]) to teachers and trainers. The shift in target from students involved in initial Higher Education to on-the-job professionals achieved by the transfer from ICIC to I-VET highlights the great flexibility and transferability of the piloted learning model and its intrinsic innovative features. By creating the privileged conditions of an international learning context for a permanent laboratory aimed at building and consolidating intercultural competences in a professional target group directly charged with educational tasks, I-VET provides such a learning pathway with innovative features; in particular, it meets the priorities set by the European Commission for LLP Programs, such as supporting initial and continuous training of VET teachers, trainers and tutors, and working at the development and transfer of innovative practices in the field of vocational education and training at tertiary level. The learning model piloted in ICIC and further enhanced in I-VET relies upon three pillars, namely:

- the international context of the network, which creates the conditions for a privileged place of learning and for informal learning within an educational context which is multi-cultural by definition;
- the interdisciplinary framework of reference, as a consequence of the different disciplines involved in the program, as a main condition for addressing different professional profiles and taking on a holistic perspective of study;
- the intercultural approach not only as an object of study, but also as an actual situation experienced by the subjects in training, that means creating a learning space for a new relational situation that brings into play and enriches the participants' social capitals.

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[2] The Intensive Program named "Interdisciplinary Course on Intercultural Competences – ICIC" was a study program aimed at developing intercultural skills in future teachers, educators and social-workers involved in initial education. For details see Onorati M.G. – Bednarz F. (eds.) Building Intercultural Competences. A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Social-Work and Health Care, Leuven, Acco, 2010.

By combining these three elements from different disciplinary perspectives, I-VET envisages itself and its outputs in an even broader cultural framework, as it is also coherent with the recent indications regarding emerging priorities of educational systems set out by the Council of Europe in 2005, on the occasion of the European Year of Citizenship through Education[3]. As also shown in the section by Bednarz and Trapletti (see infra § 1.2), the project meets some of the fundamental goals inherent in trainers and teachers' training stated on that occasion, namely:

- supporting and reinforcing citizens' rights and duties and their sense of belonging, in the name of human rights and respect for diversity;
- preparing youth to actively practice their role as citizens by enhancing a pluralist and democratic culture;
- opposing any form of violence, xenophobia, racism or intolerance;
- promoting cohesion and social justice;
- contributing to the reinforcement of civil society, through the development of knowledge, competences and awareness in the citizens.

As a result of its multidisciplinary background, the educational pattern worked out by the Project relies upon the broad vision of cultural discontinuity, which characterizes western societies increasingly worried about international migration flows and their effects on social cohesion. This is the reason for which the Project devotes ample attention to emerging evidence of a constantly changing society, such as changing trends and dynamics in migration patterns, ranging from transnational migration to the increasingly complex issue of integration (see infra Ruspini). In particular, it focuses on the link between international migration and trans-nationalism with specific reference to the European continent. It casts light on transnational lifestyle patterns spreading both "from below" due to increased mobility, ease of communication and transportation, and "from above", due to top-down policy making in East-West and South-North geographical contexts in Europe. The I-VET Project tries to respond to the challenges posed by these unprecedented situations of super-diversity, with an educational ideal that can contrast the marginalization of an increasing amount of people with a migratory background and lay down the conditions for including them in the lifelong learning system. I-VET approaches intercultural competency from a perspective that is at once pragmatic and constructive. It is realistic in that it is based on the concrete daily practices of the encounter, but it is also confident of constructing an inclusive model of education by creating the conditions that facilitate access to lifelong learning and offer an opportunity to people otherwise doomed to exclusion or vulnerable to occupational segregation, because of their marginal condition as newcomers or strangers.

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[3] "Educare alla cittadinanza democratica" documents are published on the website of the Council of Europe www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/default_EN.asp?

As increasingly required by the global dimensions of work and everyday interaction, the present study assumes intercultural competency as a transversal asset that enables workers to cope with difference and to shift continuously from one context to another. I-VET especially works on enhancing links between knowledge, awareness and a disposition to review one's taken for granted schemes. Such a transformative methodology recognizes the proper modus operandi of intercultural competency. Moreover, the collaborative methodology developed in the Project implies a concept of identity which fits in with new political and social concepts of citizenship. As elaborated on in Bignami's chapter of this book (see infra § 2.1), I-VET sets out the conditions for creating a sense of identity and belonging to a community based on collaborative, bridging and open self-definition dynamics, which echo the need for socially and politically open-ended cooperation in settings which call on a sense of invoking European identity. The emphasis on a collaborative approach in co-defining patterns of meaningful experience brings into play the concept of one's own subjective perception in relation to a context, and accordingly, others' subjective perceptions to be included in one's own perception, so as to substantiate a social and reflexive model of identity, which is of course subjective, but simultaneously open to being built upon in a co-defined and flexible way. Indeed the project aims at redefining the cultural and educational conditions that facilitate building intercultural competences, meant as a key asset centered on a cooperative attitude and mutual responsibility for finding a shared solution; it is a communicative situation that sets out the attitudinal conditions for active citizenship. In the same way, Mortari's chapter (see infra §1.3) scrutinizes the features and the meaning of "building a community", starting from onthological conceptions up to the profound and differentiated implications of relationship.

Taking the complexity of what intercultural competence is into account, the research-action carried out in the Project agreed on a definition as the culturally-aware mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enables people to cope with unfamiliar situations and ever changing problems arising (in work, as in life) from encounters with people socialized in a different culture, with a view to finding new and shared solutions (Onorati – Bednarz, 2010a). Such a broad definition implies that the personal dimension of values and the concrete experience of the encounter are not meant as occasional pretexts for applying one's own knowledge, but as a starting point for initiating a process of review and transformation of knowledge already acquired in previous situations (Mezirow, 2000). Rethinking learning and competency as a transformative process involving social, personal and professional experience implies research-action which reconstructs the complex socio-cultural scenario, in which intercultural relationships actually take place. As shown in the chapter by Nagy and Dobos (see infra § 2.4), the project analyzed the concept of competence in relation to the emerging sense of risk and strangeness affecting interaction between the individual and in-

stitutions owing to previously unknown forms of social relations increasingly based on individualism and the weakening of the institutional basis of early modernity. The category of risk, and the concomitant concepts of fear, distrust and strangeness, which have become the ciphers of ever-changing late modern societies, gave life to an expertise based on abstract knowledge consisting of a series of discourses about risk, that, in a Foucaultian perspective, serve to construct it as a phenomenon. In fact, according to Lupton (1999), it is only through these discourses that we come to know 'risk'. By producing 'truths' on risk, widespread feelings of fear and unsafeness, and consequent defensive behaviours, expert discourse on risk works like a normalization technology to control sentiments, such as strangeness which are aroused in lay people and thus to fix the inner and outer boundaries of a society, all in the name of governmentality. The approach developed in the I-VET Project, based as it is on experiential learning, renounces the mere cognitive, abstract idea of competency, completely detached from the actual context of relations, and which claims to work on inner visions and to modify values and behaviors only by acting in formal educational spaces. However, the project emphasis on experience is not conceived solely in terms of a merely pragmatic view which contextualizes communication and relativizes one's own and other's contexts in order to skillfully manipulate its rules and strategically attain consensus. Competency is re-embedded in the concrete social dimension of the encounter. Relations of proximity become the condition for re-establishing expertise on a sense of trust which no longer relies upon a dualistic, authoritarian morality of right/wrong, but on a complexity of thinking where developing one's own opinion is not simply a matter of choosing from among a multiplicity of points of view on things, but letting a multiplicity of patterns of thought arise from the different positions within a real context of relation. All of this means re-founding trust on trustworthiness. Such an approach presupposes a shift to a constructivist perspective (Bennett, 2005), based on movements, from the inside to the outside, activating meaningful interaction with and within work and life contexts, in which each subject can form experience from relational dynamics with others. Thereby, as thoroughly discussed in the chapter by Onorati (see infra), the project takes a precise epistemological stand with respect to the paradigms of knowledge and social acting that support the active role played by actors and settings in creating a shared space of meaning, which restores a condition of communicative justice among the subjects involved in the different disciplinary fields involved. Such an epistemological stand moves beyond what Perry calls "late multiplicity" or even "contextual relativism";, that is to say, the relativistic horizon that, although requiring a great deal of cognitive complexity and intellectual moral courage to investigate and compare things and make judgments about appropriateness or inappropriateness (Perry, 1999, pp. XIX-XX), turns into a mere manipulation of communicative codes, as is typical of intercultural mediation in trans-cultural settings which rely mainly upon strategic com-

munication. A constructivist approach to social interaction, meant as a properly intercultural one, implies commitment starting from the ethical re-foundation of action on shared principles, a choice which requires not only knowledge of skills and codes, but also engagement towards shared values and worldviews, hence its holistic range (see infra Onorati § 2.2). Strong emphasis is placed throughout the book on the fact that intercultural competency was dealt with as part of an interdisciplinary and inter-professional profile, not solely referring to a set of notions, skills, attitudes and behaviors, but as a versatile asset which regards one's own specific expertise in terms of a constant confrontation between a set of given knowledge and the complexity and variability of the actual relational contexts within which experts work. This is what we called embeddedness.

The principle of reciprocity at the center of intercultural action, meant as the mutual disposition to integrate in one's life elements that are part of others' lives, and to review both, also marks the shift from an ethnocentric to an ethno-relative stage (Bennett, 2002), and a concomitant passing from a relativistic to a constructivist paradigm of knowledge (Bennett, 2005). Such movements are part of a learning process articulated in proximal stages, in which the teacher works as a socio-cultural agent, who, through his/her experience, is able to move between cultures by shifting from one framework to another and to create bridges between them. The swing from more or less ethnocentric and ethno-relative attitudes towards difference is only possible if the subject is actually embedded within a situation of actual encounter with a different other. In such a situated approach, the dissonant experience of clash arising from interactions ranging from misunderstanding to conflict, works as a fundamental learning driver and as a resource for starting a process of self-questioning and thus elaborating keys, which are useful in safeguarding or re-starting the relationship with another.

The present study is of particular significance as it refers to the work of teachers and trainers called on to manage the educative relationship in a framework of increasing uncertainty and cultural discontinuity, and to re-define their own professional roles as the principle actors of mediation and socialization. To be more precise, when operating in a formative context, the teaching and learning professional must be able to mobilize resources which are useful in confronting the discontinuity of the experience and the dissonant effects which arise from unpredictable and unknown situations which arise in work and in daily life. Such an ability can only be achieved by experiencing the encounter with diversity in concrete contexts of practice, which may trigger questions, reflection and a (re)building of one's own mental schemes. In order to do so, trainers' training must above all clearly define what a practical experience of difference is, and what the *teacher's* or t*rainer's* related tasks are, whether they work in a context of institutional education, or in the field of personal services, in an enterprise or in a business organization. Moreover, it is necessary that teachers and trainers become competent in recognizing the role of subjective representations working

both in one's own and in another's mind before starting communication and shifting between cultural frameworks.

The intercultural competence proposed in this study has been conceived of as a situated and contextualized exercise of awareness and mutual adjustment, in full consonance with the constructionist approach to social inter-action. Indeed, the intercultural professional should, above all, be able to recognize and define the specific situation in which he or she is facing difference. As shown by Goffman (1938), the definition of the situation is a preliminary to every social interaction, in which the ability to recognize and handle the cultural and symbolic frameworks of reference plays a crucial role. This is especially true when the communicative situation works as a "problematic field of interaction", and new rules have to be negotiated. Assuming an intercultural perspective means starting an order of reciprocity moving from the mere reproduction of a cultural horizon to its revision, with a view to re-adjusting it so as to create the conditions for agreement and a shared overcoming of any conflicting situation. Becoming interculturally competent means being able to switch from the passive reproduction of cultural conditionings to the active co-re-construction of cultural frameworks working as a background. This means passing from a backwards-oriented to a future-oriented idea of culture, to being able to adopt a critical anticipatory vision of possible scenarios that allow professionals to extricate themselves from unstable and ever-changing life and professional situations. Transforming the cultural need to conjugate culture into a proper social skill in the future, what Appadurai calls ability to aspire (Appadurai, 2004, pp. 58-84), and to approach such a skill in terms of the concrete formative need to develop the necessary awareness and responsibility for competent acting, is a challenge that ever-changing societies launch to the world of education.

From an operational point of view, the model developed by the I-VET project turned into a concrete learning pathway piloted in two editions of a Summer School, the first in Aosta (Italy), and the second in Mendrisio (Switzerland), addressed to qualified, on-the-job teachers and trainers. The pivotal element of the methodology is an appraisal of the teachers' and trainers' professional backgrounds and complex biographies as a starting point for activating a process of competency gaining. In fact, the innovative trait of the proposed model is in the methodology that favors the operational transfer of the learning activities into the contexts of daily practice, guaranteeing coherence between the participants' lived experiences and the indications that will arise from the educational experience lived within the Project, and consequently its topicality and adaptability to different contexts. Fig. 1 summarizes the synchronic and diachronic steps performed throughout the I-VET learning pathway and which are necessary for building intercultural competency.

The model perceives the learning pathway as full immersion in an experiential context where the here and now is created during cohabitation and coop-

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(see infra § 3.3), in the I-VET perspective, it is necessary to permit the role of teacher and/or trainer to evolve into that of a mentor. Learning is meant as an inductive, transformative movement proceeding from inner visions, values and beliefs, affected by core social representations, towards external spaces of proximity and relationships, by setting up encounters situated in an open space outside the classroom, supported by a prepared mentor, capable of provoking thoughts which move at the periphery of social representations.

In the wake of Kolb's model, where reflection is the pivotal driver of experiential learning which transforms information into knowledge (Kolb, 1984), the reflective approach adopted by the I-VET methodology revolves around experiential learning and reflective dynamics, drawing attention to both cultural conditioning which affects personal experience, and to the processes through which such conditioning is created.

Reflection is triggered with a view not only to understanding and mastering the way in which this conditioning shapes the relationships and the communicative forms that have been activated by the encounter, but also to re-orienting it in a way that is shared by all the subjects involved in the relationship. Such an approach induces a process of cultural decentralization through a series of cognitive movements ranging from questioning to thematizing, reformulating personal experiences, up to achieving a new awareness and building new propositions. The dissonant experience of disjuncture, that is, «a situation in which we can no longer presume upon our consolidated knowledge» because «there is no harmony between our experiences and our expectations of how we have to behave» (Jarvis-Parker, 2005, p. 117) may turn into a privileged learning driver, as long as it is accompanied by reflective and self-reflective scaffolding which reframes the dissonant experience into a theoretical perspective. Scaffolding supplies the scattered impressions and gathered pieces of information with a stable pattern of knowledge that may permit further transferability to new contexts.

The I-VET model creates non-linear learning situations, in order to simulate what happens in real life, and this is the reason for which the reflective approach developed in the project does not aim at creating sequential steps of reflection on experience, as it would if a reflective cycle in the style of Gibbs (1988) were used. The reflective strategy adopted in the project makes use of the multidirectional cognitive movements through which we give relevance and sense to our memories, bringing into play the unexpected and creative reasoning and associations which characterize abductive thinking, which is also the only creative dynamic able to provide advances in knowledge[4]. To this end, a surprise effect, created by provocation, is necessary. The introduction of the unexpected is part of a teaching and learning strategy that appraises disjunctural challenges, in order to

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[4] On the creative role of abduction and it being the only form of reasoning able to introduce any new idea see Peirce Charles S., Collected Papers, 1931, 1932, 1934, 1935, 1958, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), § 5.145, 5.171, 5.186, 6.468-477.

question (de-structuring and restructuring) taken-for-granted mental schemes, and thereby putting learners in a position where they are able to manage the unknown element that hangs over everyday life in our ever-changing world. Reflection works as a scaffold for the disjunctural effects brought about by the irruption of unfamiliar or unexpected elements which informally arise during interaction with different people. Such reflection relies upon cognitive movements that are not oriented in time – before, after – but in space – outwards, inwards – in accordance with the movements of approximation and taking distance that actually occur when we feel caught off guard. By systematically combining formal and informal learning, the methodology developed in I-VET favors the rise of disjunctural experiences and consequent cognitive dissonance and emotional and affective discontinuity. However, through reflective accompaniment, cognitive movements of reflection and meta-reflection may be solicited, such as to notice (selection) and to direct (attention) to transform (impressions) and to generate (ideas, thoughts). These movements are not sequential, and turn into learning abilities if they are solicited and organized in a coherent way by practical meta-reflective devices, such as discussions, writing down, after-thoughts, comparisons, all of which are fundamental actions necessary in defining a situation (Reggio, 2010), and rendering the mental schemes affecting interactions explicit and showing them to be largely based on stereotypes. In concrete terms, the reflective approach is accomplished through personal reworking activities, that are partly shared with the group – debriefing sessions, world café, focus group – so as to foster crossing-glances and let the self and other's representation come to light, and partly worked individually through personal writing – story board, reflective diaries – so as to fix them into a coherent narrative and give relevance to impressions and reflections. Such cognitive movements imply a shift from mainly ethnocentric to ethno-relative approaches to disjunctural situations. An ethno-relative outlook is achieved through a gradual awareness of the extent to which our cultural affiliation may influence our thoughts and actions. Encounters with others, crossing glances and comparisons, represent moments of self-reflection and self-comprehension and are keys for a better definition of the situation and of one's own role in it, and are a basic element for understanding and integrating others' roles and reactions.

As clearly shown in the section by Bednarz and Trapletti (see infra § 1.2), so- ciality plays a central role in the process of building intercultural competences; that is to say, the group is considered as a resource for the experience of socializa- tion to differences and the informal learning processes which arise from it. In this sense, as also discussed in the chapter by Mortari (see infra § 1.3), intercultural edu- cation emphasizes the dimension of education that nurtures the peculiar, onto- logical, relational nature of the human being, whose identity is an open project that can only be accomplished through starting a relationship with others. Inter- cultural education appraises education in its essence, or as in Mortari's words, in promoting «the capability to construct dialog with others», so that «the structur- ing crux of any educational pathway consists of educating to think of the other».

According to the holistic perspective underlying this study, intercultural competency is regarded as a field of practice involving different dimensions of social action, each characterized by a proper system of values:

- the dimension of social relationships, working at the micro-level of subjective cultures embodied by actual ties nurturing exchange and commonalities and based on proximity-in families, with neighbors, in the district, within local associations, and so on ;
- the dimension of institutional relationships working at the macro-level of objective culture, represented by roles played by actors working within administrations, educational institutions, health care services, and so on;
- the dimension of work-related dynamics, working at the meso-level of organizational cultures, characterized by possessing specific skills and distinctive values, such as customer service, concept of precision, punctuality, ecology, autonomy, team work and cooperative attitudes, and so on.

Throughout the whole learning pathway, each participant is always considered as a member of a group, and not as a single individual. Thus, learning situations are built in a way that his/her way of managing interaction with others is continuously tested. The creation of an educational context working as a complex field of interaction has the effect of directly putting into play each participant's mode of interpersonal communication and socialization; thereby their social background is also indirectly referred to as a "social capital", a sort of normative repertory which influences the learner's capability to take responsibility for the group, to question one's own behavior through the way in which the others react to them or represent them, to tolerate ambiguity, to manage misunderstandings in terms of challenges and not of threats, to self-assess and finally to understand one's own values and make them explicit.

The centrality of the group is also proved by the way in which cooperative learning modalities were used. Participants collaborated in providing feedback and producing outputs, and also collaborated with indigenous actors in co-constructing the explored contexts, so as to create a sense of positive interdependence among the learners. As discussed in the section by DeWolf, Hoffmann and Kestler (see infra § 3.1), this becomes even more important when a learning experience – like the one created in the I-VET summer school setting – is meant to create individual moments of cognitive dissonance and emotional and affective discontinuity. Hence, the importance assumed by team building activities, (such as icebreakers and "energizers", which are meant as devices to help establish security and reciprocity in a group as a first step), and by mentors in regard to team building strategies and group dynamics, and which are used to transform the dissonant effects which arise from the clash with diversity into a positive challenge.

This learning modality assumes that the learners are actors involved in the co-construction of the context to be explored, which, though extraneous to them, they are not external observers who work on people, but an integral part of the context they have to engage with and whose natural order of interaction they inevitably modify with their presence. The learning strategy adopted during the context exploration fieldwork is meant to stimulate continuous comparisons between peers and experts, who are, in turn, actors from the territory where the activity takes place. As shown by Bednarz and Trapletti (see infra § 1.2), interac- tion in specific spaces - properly selected as integral parts of the learning situa- tion, and not as mere pretexts for the action - plays a crucial role in nurturing learning by creating problematic ambits of action and reflection. Such a situated approach demands a problem-based methodology, where learning processes are deeply rooted in concrete experience by deducing case studies/incidents/examples from the explored contexts.

The use of case studies deduced by the learners themselves from fieldwork of the explored settings aims to "stimulate" a reflective analysis of the experi- enced contexts and a self-reflective understanding of one's own position within that experience. From this step onwards, an inductive/abductive modality based on backwards and forwards cognitive movements, and on comparisons between the explored contexts and those at home begins. This is in order to activate an exchange among the participants with a view to gaining the meta-reflective ca- pability of finding an agreement upon the norms of conduct necessary to achieve a shared solution to the problems. Such an inductive experiential ap- proach does not exclude the role of theory, but infers it from below, through re- flection aimed at re-framing experience, instead of presupposing it from above, as a detached set of rules.

The final goal of such a methodology is to create self-awareness about the way we really act and react in our daily lives, as well as in professional contexts, and in this sense competence is meant as an in-depth working capability involving values, rather than a mere set of practical skills and abstract knowledge. Observa- tion of one's own mental schemes and behaviors facilitates self-assessment of one's own intercultural attitude, intended as the basis of one's awareness and openness to change. In this sense intercultural competency has much to do with Jarvis's concept of an expert being something different from merely having com- petence or expertise.

> Competence is, in a sense, when the practitioners acquire the necessary exper- tise to fit into the social situation and begin to take their situation and practice for granted. Becoming an expert is when they continue to create their own dis- juncture in the practice situation in order to enhance their expertise beyond that of merely "fitting in". It is this trying to reach beyond the taken for granted that distinguishes the expert from one who merely has competence or expertise. (Jarvis – Parker, 2005, p. 107).

As hinted at in the section by Dobos and Nagy regarding the changing relationship between the individual and institutions, and as further discussed by Onorati (see infra § 2.2), such a dive into human relationships as a whole makes intercultural learning a privileged field for re-embedding competency in social life, something that, in Giddens' words, turns intercultural work into a meeting ground between face-work and faceless commitments, where trust - the cipher of the tie between individuals and expert systems in late-modern societies - can be re-built. In a proper intercultural approach, the encounter with the other cannot be limited to dynamics of strategic interaction; the ethical level of the relationship must also be put into play. Communication is not only meant as a means for overcoming misunderstanding, but also for creating symmetry among the involved actors as a condition for real exchange and reciprocity. This is only possible thanks to a holistic approach to learning which also involves the values dimension. Such a multidimensional approach to competency has been emphasized throughout the whole project, and indeed, the didactical choices favor learners' drawing at different ambits of their own experience, ranging from professional to personal to cultural.

The importance of ethical implications is also emphasized in this study in the section by Pitkäjärvi (see infra § 3.2), especially when the implicit common framework of reference underpinning "intercultural competency", and the con- cept of competency especially referring to the health-care professions, is high- lighted. In particular, the contribution focuses on the link between the learning strategies adopted by the I-VET model and some significant elements to be found in any health-care or social-work professional's core curriculum, such as the centrality of Human Rights, and which can be considered as cornerstones of the health-care professions, of the basic structure of the learning model, and of the concept of intercultural competency itself.

By outlining a broad, holistic definition of intercultural competency, valuing both the usual pattern of expertise based on knowledge, skills and attitudes, but also the personal background appraised in terms of lived experience involving values, personal beliefs, representations, this study casts light on the complexity of international migrants. It addresses the different intercultural backgrounds of the teacher training community, by taking into account the changing character of international migration and the need for updated theoretical assessments which move beyond comprehensive frameworks. The model enhances the role of diversity by also looking at educational spaces in a very flexible way; that is to say, it relies upon methodological choices, articulated in a continuum that alternates regularly structured training activities with informal moments of encounter or immersion, as well as including different forms of interaction that characterize communication and relative ways of building sociality today. The learning pathway systematically bridges both formal and informal learning situations, as well as face-to-face and distance learning, a combination that may stimulate different

cognitive movements, through forms of exchange ranging from a virtual Platform to concrete encounters occurring on-field. Moreover, the use of social media like Facebook and Edmodo, the latter expressly constructed for sharing educational processes and outputs among educational professionals, helped in the creation of a network capable of building a community of practice and shared interests, certain to survive the I-VET experience and to engender new projects. The blended format of the learning pathway allows the integration of the different forms of communication that today inform real life in the learning process, so as to create an interactive field that genuinely simulates the symbolic and social complexity of our times. The participants are asked from the beginning to be active and proactive during communication, team building, observation, exploration, planning and producing learning activities. The learners' background – be it social, professional or biographical - is considered as a privileged resource for creating a learning context open to exchange. As also shown by Ruspini (see infra § 2.3), in the wake of Krase's (2011) visual pedagogy, a learning method based at once on vis- ual and virtual teaching technologies, if integrated with traditional modes to fos- ter an understanding of multicultural settings in a cross-cultural and comparative perspective, represents a powerful response to emerging social needs concerning current forms of international migration; or to put it in another way, migration has grown in volume and complexity, so that many countries nowadays are simul- taneously countries of origin, transit and destination for migrant workers.

Last but not least, another important factor in the learning pattern worked out by I-VET is time, which is not simply a chronological variable scanning the steps of the pathway, but rather a sense-making dimension inextricably linked with the process of knowledge achievement. Time is an integral component of a learning process based on the concrete experience of the context of the encounter and the reworking of this through reflection in which personal narratives are evoked and unexpected connections between distant fields of experience and knowledge (abductive cognitive movements) are solicited in order to make new hypothesis about reality. In any case, the need for more time often proved to be in contrast with the intensive and compressed nature of the didactical formula of a summer school. This is why it was made up for in methodological terms by creating an educational model which places more importance on processes and interaction than on the accomplishment of a standardized final product. The competency achievement is read and assessed throughout the pathway, not so much in terms of effective responses to problem-solving, but rather according to the participants' shown attitude and capability to problematize situations, to deal with them in a cooperative way, to develop awareness about cultural frameworks and to be proactive. These can all be considered as components of the competency asset, which is more oriented towards building relations than to fulfilling tasks, in a perspective that lays down the conditions for the future transfer of such an exceptional learning experience to one's work place.