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INOJT
ERASMUS PROJECT

DIMENSIONS OF 'IN-SIDE-NESS' AND 'OUT-SIDE-NESS'



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Dimensions of 'In-side-ness' and 'Out-side-ness' in Education

The idea of the InOut-project was born in a hotel lounge in Linköping several years ago. The university teachers involved were at the end of another EU-project in teacher education called TIAC (Teachers' Intercultural Awareness and Competence) which had included a series of three Erasmus intensive programmes involving student teachers from several European universities. Due to the extremely positive feedback of the student participants, we decided to continue our work and keep up the formal core elements of the course: multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, drama education and the combination of cognitive and experiential learning. At the same time, we wanted to shift the focus from intercultural awareness in schools to a new topic.

As teachers involved in these three courses we had grown together as a group. A strong feeling of belonging had been created - belonging to a project, to a group, but also to an open-minded culture of teaching and mutual learning that we had nurtured over the years. From former student participants of the three intensive programs we had received a similar feedback. In this setting, the idea of Inside out / Outside in - Building bridges in teacher education (InOut) was born. From there, we set off for a kind of epistemological journey into the semantic spaces of "in-side-ness" and "out-side-ness" in school and education. Through years of working, teaching, learning, eating, drinking, drawing, writing, thinking and discussing together we discovered more and more dimensions - social, spatial, cultural, and other - of this profound binary opposition, that we considered relevant to teaching.

The distinction between inside and outside is most obvious in its **spatial dimension** - for example in housing and architecture. Being inside a building is connected to the idea of shelter and protection whereas the outside is the sphere of the unknown, the danger and the wilderness. However, the outside world can also be attractive, raise curiosity, stimulate imagination and creativity - one of the stimulus for travelling - whereas for some people the inside of a home or a building might be related to experiences of conflict, oppression or violence. When transferring the spatial dimension of inside and outside to education it has been interesting to look at school architectures and how in different European countries the border between the school campus and the outside has been constructed and controlled: in some schools, there is not even a landmark separating the school from its surroundings, whereas in others walls and security controls regulate who is going in and out.

This is similar to the **territorial dimension** of the modern nation state – a politically constructed spatial entity that is surrounded by national borders. Based on legislations the practices of border control regulate who is allowed to come inside the national territory, and who is not. In these logics, national citizens belong to the defined territory, whereas foreigners are usually considered outsiders. The analysis of schoolbooks and other material artifacts used in the classroom– such as maps, pictures and songbooks – reveals how this closed nationalistic thinking has been – and probably still is - implemented in teaching and education.

The **social dimension** points at the distinction between insiders and outsiders. Individuals might feel part of a group or excluded from a group depending on what aspect of their identity becomes relevant in a specific situation. But who decides which little piece of the identity mosaic becomes relevant, in a specific social situation? Why is it skin colour in one situation, and lifestyle preferences in another? Who decides, who is considered an insider, and who is an outsider? Team building activities, the pie chart exercise and drama education help students to become aware of and reflect on the social dimension of becoming an outsider and how to overcome these distinctions in a group.

Sharing a common **language** is an important condition for the access to any social context. Not knowing the language of a given social or institutional context will create feelings of outsidership – since the access to a group as well as the expression of the own identity are limited. Most migrant children have gone through this experience, especially when they come from a linguistic background that is very different. In the context of a multilingual classroom, the concept of cultural literacy helps to address the role of language in education. Whereas differences in language are often considered obstacles in teaching, cultural literacy and language portraits will help teachers and students appreciate and positively address language diversity in the classroom.

Beyond language, there is a **cultural dimension** which might put individuals in the situation of feeling inside or outside a specific context like a school. The idea of culture is much deeper than language alone- it includes artefacts, values and beliefs, as well as underlying assumptions which unconsciously guide actions and values. These general considerations – often disputably applied to national cultures - can be transferred to school cultures, when schools are analysed as cultural entities. It was therefore important to us to present positive examples of open and participatory school cultures to the students during the course.

For school visits, the observation of material artefacts and behaviour, as well as discussions with pupils, teachers, and parents have been valuable methodological tools.

In **humanistic geography**, the concept of insiderness and outsiderness has been extended to the emotional attachment or detachment of human individuals to a specific place. The term place in that academic thinking is more than just a location, it refers to the complex of a specific material setting, social interaction and symbolic value of a specific geographical entity for a group of people in a specific moment of time. The geographer Edward Relph has developed a taxonomy of insiderness and outsiderness as specific degrees of emotional experiences of places. Emotional experiences can range from existential insiderness – a feeling of home - to existential outsiderness – a feeling of complete estrangement. During the intensive programmes, we raised the question whether the concept of place in all three dimensions - material, social, and symbolic - can be transferred to schools or universities. Along these categories students were able to reflect on their own school experiences and identify elements that made them develop feelings of insiderness or outsiderness.

When transferring these considerations into an educational community, the **pedagogical dimension** of insiderness and outsiderness becomes relevant. What does it mean to be an insider or an outsider in a school or classroom and what can be the advantages and disadvantages of these different positions? Individuals can be experiencing education in significantly different ways which will have an impact on positive or negative development, good educational outcomes or experiences of failure and eventually dropout.

One of the political driving forces of the project is the concern for so called “school drop outs” or early school leavers (ESL). According to Eurostat data, roughly one out of nine young adults in the European Union leaves school without completing upper secondary school or training. It is very likely that many of them will face unemployment, poverty and social exclusion in their future lives. So how can we make school a place, where all children and teachers, but also parents and other members of the local community develop a sense of belonging?

One of the biggest challenges of the project has been the assessment of the learning outcomes of such an unusual academic course - probably best described as an experiential *dérive*, an exercise carried out with students.

To map this specific cognitive and emotional learning experience we used **reflective sketchbooks** as the most adequate tool: individual in shape and materiality, loose in the order of pages, open in forms of expression - the sketchbook resists any attempt of definite linearity, logic and coherence – criteria that are in way inherent to the textual language. From the very beginning –after a short introduction to the methodology - we asked students to document their thinking in their personal sketchbooks.

At the end of the course we asked students to prepare a **group performance** representing their understanding(s) of insiderness and outsiderness in school and education. For that purpose, the language of drama turns out to be the richest: being dialogical and relational in setting, offering the possibility of using multiple languages including the universal human language of the body and being rooted in an “as-if epistemology,” encouraging creativity of thought and expression.

Only after the course, when the participants were back home in their university environment, we would ask them to write a short **academic essay** developing first of all their own “personal theory of insiderness and outsiderness” in relation to the texts they have read and the inputs they have experienced, and second to apply this theory to the analysis of a real personal experience of outsiderness in their life.

We – that is a group of colleagues from eight European universities with very different disciplinary backgrounds such as drama education, education science, pedagogy, geography, history of education, language teaching, and different professional experiences - all share the idea of creating something different in teacher training and firmly believe that the form of teaching must transcend conventional academic courses.

At the end, it is probably needless to say that the use of “we” in this text implicates not an exclusive, but an inclusive “we” - inviting every reader who feels part of this we, while reading the text - to join us on this *dérive*, navigate through the impressions and the pedagogical guides of this resource package. It has been designed for everybody interested in Insiderness and Outsiderness in education and we hope that it enables you to reproduce the parts which have aroused your curiosity, or inspired you to carry some of the ideas into the world.

We also invite you to share your experiences in visual, textual or audible form.

So, please, come inside...