

## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS IN BELARUS

© Szabolcs ZALAY  
(University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary)

[zalaysz@gmail.com](mailto:zalaysz@gmail.com)

*Thanks to the Hungarian Association for Development of Adult Education we were in Belarusian ecological camp with from 20 July to 31 July 2009. The camp's aim was an ecological camp's construction. It was the first step of an extraordinary idea, thanks for the Mercator Foundation from Germany. Three nations, three camps, three years are the fundament of idea in the interest of a worthy aim. The aim is a virtual eco-camp. The camp's exterior story is only of secondary importance. The essence resides in human contacts. The young adults learn from each other most during work and games. So started intercultural communications between the youth of three nations.*

Our global challenges demand such local solutions of us, which together with the consciousness of a paradigm shift aide the development of such a “critical mass” (László, 1999), which may be capable of turning around reversible processes and halting the ones that are irreversible. In the summer of 2009, an international ecological construction camp, under the name EWCA3 (European Work Camp), for 10-10 young students of the following countries and organisations was arranged by the Mercator Foundation from Essen, in collaborating with the Hungarian Association for Development of Adult Education, the International Public Association «Education without Borders» from Belarus, and the „Social Service for the Understanding with Eastern Europe” from Germany. This had been done as a part “The eco-friendly house in a small village” program.

The Belarusian hosts organized the camp on a rather strange site some 220 kilometres from Chernobyl, where the most tragic nuclear catastrophe of all history happened. Despite all that the place was a wonderful part of the nature, in Dunajevo village, where, all in all, there are only 3 houses. The local civil organization with Galina Veramejchyk’s management purchased one of the houses on site, which proved to be suitable for the realisation of the international learning project.

The program was very simple, it did not consist of anything else in fact, that the students tried to make the house's neighbourhood friendlier for future campers, who may learn about the current questions of the protection of nature first handed. A jungle’s worth of undergrowth was cleansed in what was a former apple grove, eco-toilets were carpentered, a crude sauna was built and the small cottage was repainted, thus preserved from the adversities of local weather. The camp's life started off on more hidden paths other than that of the wild nature’s. According to previous experiences deeper happenings are worthy of analysing primarily on the basis of the

outlines of acting learning, motivational activity, group cohesion, intercultural communication and ecological consciousness.

## On the Road of Acting Learning

The dreamers of the camp keep one primary paradigm in their sights, according to which with the aid of experiential learning personalities and the learning group may get richer by such emotional experiences like that, which can be practised relatively fast and deep effect to the existing world view, constructions (Feketéné Szakos, 2002), the social concerns and network structures. We may recognise the essence of the effect-mechanism of such a mode of learning by changes happening on a deeper, subjectively understood level of due to the experience of discovery, which the individual may manage to experience through the happenings gone through personally. At the same time, systems applying such pedagogy, for example the EWOC3 project, with the conscious organization of the community activities planned, collective learning situations insuring substantial self-reliance after all are brought about (Zalay, 2006), thus greatly improving the ability of openness, empathy and of understanding others in communities through the experience of synergistic cooperation experienced jointly.

One's impression of the camp in Dunajevo was that all exterior changes depend on the individual's resolution. Nobody forced anybody into anything. Everybody took a part in the different works based on individual decision. It appeared as only the wild and just laws of the nature set boundaries to freedom. In reality however, every minute was regulated according to a plan, even before anything started, owing to the organizers' exceptionally conscientious preparatory work. This agenda with coloured figures, picturesque signs was posted under all of the camp's time in that open community space, the "summerhouse", where the young people spent most of their time, where they dined and played together at the time of the one of the group-sessions. Despite that nobody felt like being locked in, being it in space or in time, according to feedback. The secret of this paradox-look-alike resided in motivational activity.

## Motivational Activity

According to one of the basic principles of our applied observational research, the teaching-learning process can be considered efficient, if changes in understanding or in the language of constructivism, conceptual changes are achieved. Only changes such as these will be enduring and only they infiltrate into long-term memory, and furthermore only these will lead to changes of view on a deeper level (Nahalka, 2002). For changes such as these to occur it is not enough for a teacher explain to his students for example the topic, that in the name of utilitarianism due to human interventions the rapid decrease in natural diversity is one of the most serious problems on the Earth, not only threatening flora and fauna, but the human society as well (Quinn, 1993). What's more, it does not really help, if he takes them away to go on an excursion to a beautiful countryside where being torn out of urban existence, they are hard to apprehend where the global problem is. Merely making them do, i.e. the pedagogic practice building upon inductive logic cannot generate a real change in the participants.

There is need for the promotion of the deductive process. Both planning and the camp's preparation played an enormous role in the successful

establishment of the learning process. The participants prepare themselves for the camping trip according to previously suggested viewpoints. The participants “trained” themselves with research of local manifestations of global problems, the examination of the native environment together with a natural conservation situation, and with group-dynamics training for building the future community. Naturally, this learning phase was not without tenseness. For several participants the preliminary training meant confronting with their world views previously constructed. Measured was its adaptiveness and resourcefulness. For a young man, one such confronting may lead to crisis situations. Exceptionally important is the fact, that the educator leading the given training be able to run suitable personality protection mechanisms: let the change not be obligatory for the individual differing from the other ones (Zalay, 2006). Eventually, all participants decided in favour of setting out to the great unknown, which not only meant a foreign country but also belonging to a new layer of society.

### Group-cohesion

Experiencing a group experience may mean a newer level of learning in the case, if the process gone through jointly presents itself as an electoral opportunity for the participants, quasi, that multidimensional world-view (Bohár, 1993), that they can face against the “artificial man” or “unidimensional man” world-view, which in increasingly popular in today's world. In present day world giving lack of value, or better yet, in many cases “value imitations” it is important for the learning individual to see the difference in value, about which András Bohár claims that “while the unidimensional man is characterised by the preference of the mechanical-inorganic nature view, power-aggressive politics, negative utopias, life-estranging religious dogmatism, pathological personality disturbances, the decorator's or functional art's, the utilitarian one and consumer ethics and the neglect of the traditional values, the universal man is characterised by organic nature view, real-politics and peaceful aims, real utopias, the religious profession ethos, the liking of self-analysis and opening up a world art offering perspective, the plural ethic horizon, and the harmony of the traditional and modern values”.

The German, Hungarian and Belarusian “delegates” needed short just a time for the acceptance and assumption of working in community forms. The camp's life structure was edited in such a way that it yielded mixed groups from the beginning. Every day, different tripartite groups supplied a service in the community spaces every day, at the same time newer and newer units came into existence in the camp-organizing sector, and in these small groups all three nations were always equally represented. This common work was not only the scene of language practice so, but started such an intensive adaptation and assistance stimulation in the single participants, that gave surprising results, in most cases, even for themselves.

Beside the daily work, a very important component of the learning process was training, partly constant, partly in occasional small groups. On the row of the trainings, in an indirect manner, the participants received particularly valuable feedbacks from those communicational acts, of which they are parts of day to day in their everyday lives, but do not have an occasion to look into such a mirror, which was here represented by the strange place and time, strange characters and companions arriving from different places. The natural hierarchy-order of the group also unfolded in the course of these practices, but as a result of the controlled process

treatment those present participated in a disciplined and ambitious manner in the tasks that generated tension. The sources for all problems were explored, solutions to those were proposed, in the form of separate talks as well, thus generating a peaceful need for change in the participants.

The organisers could owe these achievements to the consistent validation of the facilitating pedagogical role. As a result of this, communicational abilities may have developed in an optimal manner; a considerable improvement was observable within the progress of choosing suitable communicational strategies and with time the different sociological and foreign language disadvantages deriving from differences were easily overcome.

## Intercultural Communication

Real intercultural communication began between the participants. Such first-rate curiosity motivated the interest for each other's language, their culture, mentality with the natural birth of the friendships, which guided the camp dwellers willing to lasting experiences. This level of learning represented the quality, because of which this initiation should be judged fruitful. No language barrier stood in the way of the starting communication network building. The participants taught each other in English, German, Russian, Belarusian and Hungarian. Some people not only started learning each other's language, but folksongs, poems were acquired in an unknown language under the fortnight. That became an eloquent testimony to these young adults having opened towards each other and each other's culture, and having set up an example with this that may be instructive for adult society as well.

## Results

All in all, the participants may have gone through a special and most fruitful variant of learning under the fortnight spent in the EWOCA3 camp. The paradigm shift of ecological consciousness may not have been made their own with the frustrated reception of the mass of information, but with the help of a much deeper and more lasting experience, which was based on the experience of common acts, within the medium of harmony of freedom ensuring strong motivation. They had a chance of stepping out of their usual lives, and could experience, what it means to be a universal, autonomous person, by means a peaceful approach to integral living space and by an honest surprise at human nature.

## References

- BOHÁR A. (1993): *Antropológiai és etikai vázlatok*. Keraban Kiadó, Budapest. Budapest.
- FEKETÉNÉ SZAKOS É. (2002): *A felnőttek tanulása és oktatása új felfogásban*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.
- LÁSZLÓ E. (1999): *A tudat forradalma. Új Paradigma*, Budapest.
- NAHALKA I. (2002): *Hogyan alakul ki a tudás a gyerekekben?* Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest.
- QUINN, D. (1993): *Ismael*. Múzsák Kiadó, Budapest.
- ZALAY Sz. (2006): Intensively making up for communication disadvantages. *Europe*, 4.
- ZALAY Sz.(2006): Konstruktivizmus és drámapedagógia. *Iskolakultúra*, 1. pp. 66-71.