

## **Intercultural Competence via Collaborative Tools**

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*Abstract:* - The present study focuses on the exploitation of modern Information and Communication Technologies in the service of Intercultural Education. Specifically, it is presented how collaborative learning environments entitle an added value and facilitate the targeted goals of gaining Intercultural Competence. For that purpose it is referred to the SCOUT environment as a vehicle of a dynamic and evolutionary interaction among students of Primary and Secondary Education all over the Europe. Through it students gain intercultural skills and benefit from contacting each other with reference to a common goal.

*Key-Words:* - Intercultural Competence, Educational Technology, Collaboration, Communication, Interaction

### **1 Introduction**

The current political and economical status effects, moreover than ever, on the necessary movement of crowds. The structure of population configuration is continually changing inducing the transformation of the whole national policy of a country. It is more than ever needed an advanced and modernized educational system which may support all these changes and meet the demands of modern era. The development of technology has made it clear that

different opinions around the world may meet each other and bridge the produced gap. The ability of communicating with other members of society actuates to the reconsideration of one's thought and beliefs.

A multicultural society reflects upon the field of education which plays an important role due to the symbiosis of different cultures. When they contact each other, they are conflicted in terms of the different political positions, social values, historical

references and the perceptions of social organization. In an intercultural environment the individual features are protected and respected by the rest of members of the society. Thus, the role of education is improved to that one which contributes to the enhancement of cultural multiform and opposition to the cultural equalization. Modern students should have a variety of skills in order to correspond to increasing demands. ICTs belong to these new outfits as a knowledge and thought facilitator where different races discuss about a list of topics in a civilized and bridgeable manner.

Intercultural Education (IE) arose from a new perspective of socio-economic reality which was imposed either by the verbal or metaphorical immigration (thoughts and opinions). IE is perceived as the dynamic and humanistic choice of interactions and interrelations among different cultures and may contribute to the development of a multi-cultural national identity. IE sets double targets:

- the immigrants-students in order they find a new home and
- the indigenous students in order they respect and make true the symbiosis of different people in the same society.

Presence of different people in a society automatically motivates the research of educational methods, so as be effectively integrated in future society retaining their individual features. Intercultural Model as a method of approaching the different is the last attempt (after counter-racism, multicultural movement etc.) emphasizing on cultural meetings and interchanges with the perspective of cultural enrichment. The meetings are done on the basis of common understanding, acceptance, and equality. And this is learnt during the first grades of Education not as a course content but as a problem solving method. European Programmes subsidize and research for the best educational practices in IE. These experiences are expected to enhance the linguistic, cultural and social citizens' fortune. For that purpose the supported educational system should be of high standards.

## 2 Intercultural Competence

Intercultural Competence (IC) describes the ability to see relationships between different cultures critically. People who acquire this ability are conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather

than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural.

According to the Byram and Zarate's model [1] there are five characteristics of IC:

- Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
- Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
- Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.
- Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
- Critical cultural awareness: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

The above five elements constitute the framework for analyzing the effectiveness of the case study presented below. Effectiveness of an educational intervention program is conceived as those modifications made to the traditional education that may make learners gain IC.

## 3 Advanced Learning Environments in Intercultural Education

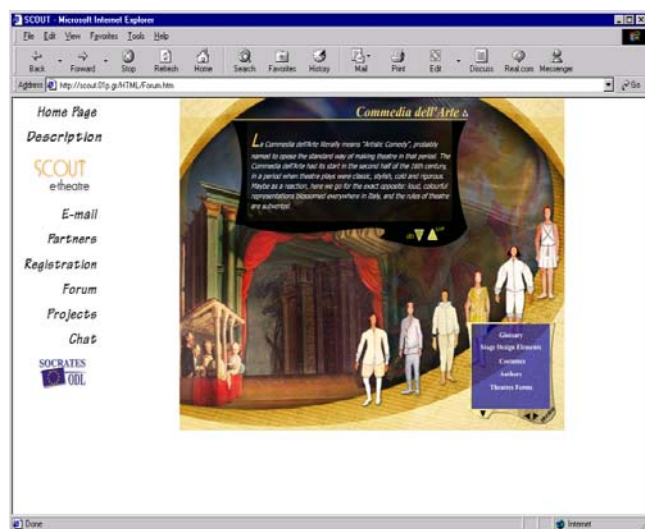
Among the benefits one may own through emerging technologies is that of facilitating the communication, collaboration and active participation [2]. A special category of these technologies are the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning systems which support the collaborative learning as an instructional method of interculturalism. The role of peers in these environments magnifies their capacities with reference to dynamically established relationships among the participants and following development of IC.

Then our study focuses on an interesting European programme which utilized the theatre through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to promote the aims of IC. Through "SCOUT: Student Collaborative and Open learning for eUropean Theatre and culture" it is

attempted to develop and transfer knowledge and skills to all students of Primary and Secondary Education.

In the SCOUT frame a network platform was developed to facilitate the asynchronous and synchronous communication/collaboration and the upload of respective educational material. The main concept is that schools from different European countries work together on a project related to a theatrical scenario, play or history and publicize the results of their collaboration on the SCOUT platform. A series of activities are produced and uploaded by their teachers. Teachers and students communicate either synchronously (via chat) or asynchronously (via forum, e-mail) each other. The history of theatre is taught through an interactive game. The SCOUT emphasizes on the collaboration among the actors of educational scenarios.

The user starts the game choosing the type of theatre or the theatrical period they want to play. Having made their choice they must pass all the stages successfully. The stages refer to a variety of choices such as theatrical pillars, costumes, masks, writers and known phrases. ICTs are used as an instructional mean of how different learning objects could be composed together in an intercultural theme such as theatre. Likely, the vehicle could be changed to poetry, environmental projects, health education, etc.



**Fig. 1** The interactive environment of SCOUT

The SCOUT environment may introduce students to intercultural and open way of thinking nullifying the discriminations and founding reconciliation with the different. In this way, they benefit multiply as they gain knowledge –in terms of theatre, drama, literature, history, life- and higher

order skills –such as creative and critical thinking skills. Simultaneously, the user gains a holistic way of thinking, while they activate their thinking through innovation and imagination.

Additionally, through SCOUT environment it is achieved:

- cultural meeting on the basis of mutuality and equality,
- the produced hindrances are surpassed and
- the setting of cultural “exchanges” [3].

Thus, abolishing the separating lines the cultural reconciliation is achieved as well as the identification of value and importance of living with others.

The interactive communication among the cultures may be transformed into intercultural interpenetration as a process of acceptance and integration of different cultural signs into our society. As a consequence, teacher and students met each other interactively, in a non-linear model of communication. They worked together beyond the restrictions, collaborating, sharing their knowledge and resources substantiating their pedagogic role in the learning process. Engaging hundred of students from 36 European countries SCOUT seemed to be an exemplary case of introducing learners in IC model.

Despite the fact that assessment point was of prime importance, it seemed risky to quantify affective facets of IC such as tolerance, respect, openness or curiosity [4]. Qualitative evaluation was only made by the researchers and the results were encouraging in terms of the students’ participation, enthusiasm, teachers’ collaboration and acceptance.

## 4 Summary & Final Remarks

If we look ahead another 5 years, standard collaborative technologies will include features or options for videoconferencing, chat, surveying, mentoring, joint document creation and resource sharing. Novel features might include sensor indicators of the need for collaboration as well as the availability and selection of collaborative partners. Specialists will also be available on demand to help brainstorm ideas or edit collaborative documents. And there undoubtedly will be peer and expert ratings to choose the best person the job or to match learners to specific types of expertise.

As education needs become lifelong, advances in collaborative learning tools will impact everyone. But it is not necessarily the tools for collaboration that will be the most important or interesting, but the types of interactions made possible by these

technologies. Given the collaborations that are now possible with peers, trainers, expert mentors and even artificially intelligent agents, there certainly is no shortage of collaborative tools and associated learning opportunities.

Greece was one of the European countries that participated in the SCOUT project. Unfortunately, in Greek educational reality this stopped due to the lack of technological support in school classrooms. Greek teachers attempted to collaborate with their colleagues from Spain and Great Britain creating learning scenarios and activities inspired by Lorca's act but it didn't work in Greek school classes due to technological inadequacies. Despite the Greek failure to materialize the effort, other attempted efforts were much "luckier". Students inspired by Greek ancient acts and their heroes such as Helectra, Ekavi, Antigoni, etc. to create their own theatrical scenario to put on that play.

Thus, students were engaged in authentic problems negotiating a potential event from real life. World web functioned as a means of query and broader research. According to the teachers' messages their students' enthusiasm was great and a number of social issues were enhanced concerning the racism phenomenon. Finally, the exchanged messages were of great importance while students and teachers moved on.

Taking for granted that the main idea of SCOUT was successful and the inadequacy of technological structures made it seem failed, we are planning to utilize the SCOUT philosophy in an opened learning environment in which educators could enrich and produce a series of learning scenarios and activities easily in order to engage their multi-cultural learners in an accessible and functional intercultural context. Aiming at all those educators who intend to help their learners develop IC, it is hoped that it may become the key factor of an opened society to the difference with a critical eye. The next steps of research include the construction of collaborative learning scenarios and the corresponding evaluation study.

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