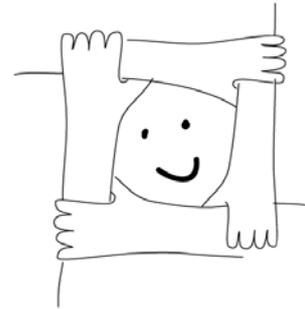




Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



PARENTING IN A MULTICULTURAL EUROPEAN CITY

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PARENTING RESEARCH

“Approaches to cultural awareness” Action Research 2008-2009

Final Report

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Approaches to cultural awareness

Action Research 2008-2009

Cornelia Schlick, Giorgio Comi

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“To wonder about cultural structures which affect behaviours and representation forms of reality is an inevitable and unavoidable process to comprehend social transformations which occur in the actual scenarios of globalisation“¹

The objective [...] is to help in dealing with the differences in thinking, feeling, and action of people around the globe. It will show that although the variety in people's minds is enormous, there is a structure in this variety that can serve as a basis for mutual understanding.²

1 Introduction

The report at hand describes the process of a research work with parents and displays first results.

Successful parenting in an intercultural context is dependent on understanding and sensitive communication between cultures, between parents and teachers, between parents and social workers, between parents and social agencies and policy makers. The first results of our research are a means for practising intercultural situations (for parents and their counterparts).

During the last year, we developed a method that should enable professionals to sharpen their manner of perception concerning other cultures.

We think that the method of narrative interviewing allows people a greater voluntariness to tell us what is important to them. We want people to become experts of their own affairs and experts of their own life. At the same time we as professionals receive a response that revises our “cultural glasses”.

For the duration of a year, we listened to, we read about, categorised, revised, collected and evaluated data of life stories of families from different countries of origin.

The findings result in recommendations (3.4 Recommendation), which can be applied by the partners or be developed further. The possibility of a follow up project might also arise (4. Conclusion).

a. Flash back: Context: “Research in the Parenting Project”

The application for ‘Parenting in a Multicultural European City’ identified some research themes that all partners were interested in. We wanted to use these themes to plan our research projects. Our aim was to produce and work on three research papers (‘Empowerment as parents, ‘Integration and intercultural awareness’, ‘Empowerment of representative parents and groups to affect policy change.’). And we had the task to engage the parents in a research project.

¹ Onorati, M.G., Bracciale, R. (2007) *I valori emergenti in una prospettiva interculturale. Una ricerca in Valle d’Aosta*, Le Château, Aosta

² Hofstede, G. (2003) *Culture and Organizations. Software of the Mind*, Profile Books, London

In Girona (Spain – 3rd meeting), our group worked on a first list of questions (parents' activities- see attachment). During the discussions, some concerns about the validity of the list emerged. We decided to keep on working to obtain an instrument to use effectively in an intercultural context. **Parenting** has been chosen as a theme that is of interest across all cultures and social groups. Each 'Parents Group' will identify their shared and different cultural views on parenting.

However, in the process of our “research work” all partners found out:

1. It is difficult to measure “**parenting**” because the definition of educational models and parental behaviour rules is very open in Western societies. We have to remember that our behaviours are strongly influenced by the views and judgment of members of our family circle. This happens also in interpersonal relations, in social relations in general, and with educational agencies and centres of aggregation. Nevertheless, we depend on other's opinions, on fashions and on advertising. The definition of educational models and rules of parental behaviours respond in social and communicative forms that differ from culture to culture.

2. It is not feasible to work on three topics ('Empowerment as parents, 'Integration and intercultural awareness', 'Empowerment of representative parents and groups to affect policy change.') at a time.

Based on this discussion among the partners, on our 4th meeting in Patras we decided for the theme

'Integration and intercultural awareness'

Working together to provide a 'City orientation for new parents' will allow people to get to know each other. Using soft outcomes will involve finding out about attitudes and beliefs and how these may change.

Focus: Changes in attitude

Compare with documents from Judith

The partner group asked the partners Germany (IBAF, Cornelia Schlick) and Switzerland (FSEA-SVEB, Giorgio Comi) to find an evaluation method to find out about attitudes and how these may change. Our underlying idea is based on the article by Giorgio Comi (see attachment)

b. Theoretical approach- empirical search

Our project planning draws on cultural psychology studies. During the last 15 years, the socio-constructivist area has examined the communication situations. In particular, considering the intercultural communication context, the physical context and the historical dimension of people has been taken into account, as well as their interpersonal relations and the relations which occur between them and the formal/informal institutional system of the countries they live in.³

³ Mantovani, G. (2000), *Exploring borders Understanding culture and psychology*, London, Routledge.

i. Context

Our work is based on theoretical *observations*. We will briefly present them because a work carried out in an intercultural context "draw[s] loosely from several different theoretical traditions"⁴ (Green Burleson 2003).

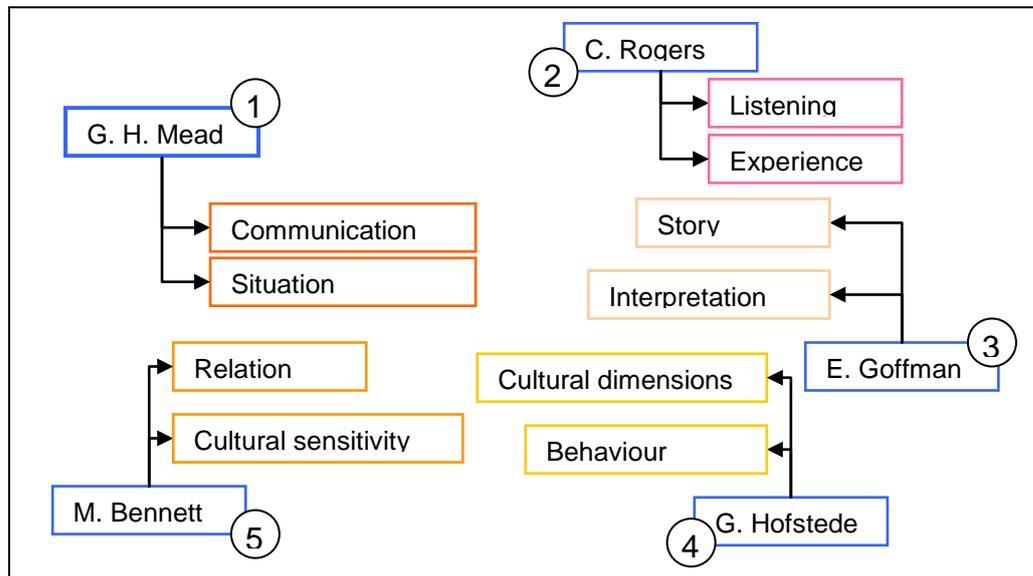


Figure 1: **Different theoretical traditions used in our project**

(1) Our approach to human communication is based on George Herbert Mead's reflections. According to him, mind and human actions are determined by the set of social relations and are not typical of an individual.

Language, in Mead's view, is based on a socially shared symbolic support. The mind therefore develops through interpersonal exchange and the communicative process. Mind is, above all, a social product which works through socially shared symbols. Mead⁵ considers the individual as a social subject and his/her experiences are, as a consequence, fundamental to understanding his/her thoughts. The individual gets in contact with other people by communication and via symbols and builds their own identity. Communication is organised as follows:.

An individual communicates with others

1. An initial understanding between is assumed
2. The response is the result of an interpretation
3. This process is a kind of *communicative loop* which generally leads to the search of a shared meaning.

The mind is fundamentally a social product
 The mind works "through" social symbols (their meaning is socially shared)
 The mind develops "through" social interaction and communicative processes

⁴ Gree, J.O., Burleson, B.R (2003), *Handbook of communication and social interaction skills*, Mahwah, NJ [u.a.] : Erlbaum, p. 7

⁵ Mead, G.H. (1966) *Mente, sé e società*, ed Giunti, Firenze e Lewis A. Coser (1983) *I maestri del pensiero sociologico*, Il Mulino, Bologna

(2) Carl Rogers⁶'s works are based on a person-centred approach. His approach to understanding personality and human relationships found wide application in various domains. Applications include a theory of personality, interpersonal relations, education, nursing, cross-cultural relations and other "helping" professions and situations.

Rogers approached a series of propositions to assure a "good quality" relation among people.

- 1 We should trust in our intuitions.
- 2 Others' opinion is just a simple reference.
- 3 Experience should be the centre of our interest.
- 4 If we communicate thoughts and feelings, we receive a strong feedback.
- 5 The Human being is provided with a constructive force: if she/he feels "accepted" and understood, she/he tends to improve herself/himself.

Listening and empathy Respect of the other and of his/her experiences To tell about oneself to receive feedback Positive communication for common well-being

(3) Several researchers have investigated how people present themselves: to tell their personal story is one of the ways. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*⁷ the sociologist Erving Goffman proposed to work on social interactions considering the narration of daily experiences. Goffman used the "stories" to let people express the representations and roles they built during their lifetime. In particular, Goffman pinpointed that the context in which one tells the story (location, time, audience) plays a fundamental role to comprehending why one tells a story in a certain way. Furthermore, the author stated that a real truth does not exist, but rather a constant interpretation of our life, which changes according to the specific situation in which we tell it.

Peoples' personal stories are fundamental Through the story I talk about myself, here and now I talk about myself in a different way with different people To tell stories to give meaning to my own life
--

(4) Considering the intercultural domain, we quote Geert Hofstede. The researcher defined some cultural dimensions to describe the cultural behaviour of wide groups. Furthermore he developed a model that identifies 5 macro dimensions⁸:

⁶ Rogers, Carl. (1959). A Theory of Therapy, Personality and Interpersonal Relationships as Developed in the Client-centred Framework. In (ed.) S. Koch, Psychology: A Study of a Science. Vol.3 Formulations of the Person and the Social Context. New York: McGraw Hill. Vedere <http://www.acp-italia.it/?act=Documenti&completo=si&id=3> (attivo 09.09)

⁷ Goffman E. (1969) *La vita quotidiana come rappresentazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna

⁸ Hofstede, G. (1994) *Vivre dans un monde multiculturel*, Les Éditions d'Organisation, Paris : http://www.geert-hofstede.com/geert_hofstede_resources.shtml (09.09)

- 1- Power distance
- 2- Individualism versus collectivism
- 3- Masculinity versus femininity
- 4- Uncertainty avoidance
- 5- Long-term versus short-term orientation

The ways of conceiving "life" are different, depending on cultures
 Opinions regarding *violence, national wealth, mobility between social classes or with the legal obligation in developed countries for citizens to carry identity cards* are different.

(5) Also Milton Bennett delved into the study of intercultural relation⁹. The author was mainly interested in interindividual relations and discovered a series of intercultural sensitivities which were later organised in continuous areas. These areas defined a wide range of possibilities between an ethnocentric stage and an ethno-relative stage¹⁰:

- 1 - Denial: Does not recognise cultural differences.
- 2 - Defence: Recognises some differences, but sees them as negative.
- 3 - Minimisation: Unaware of projection of own cultural values; sees own values as superior.
- 4 - Acceptance: Shifts perspectives to understand that the same "ordinary" behaviour can have different meanings in different cultures.
- 5 - Adaptation: Can evaluate others' behaviour from their frame of reference and can adapt behaviour to fit the norms of a different culture.
- 6 - Integration: Can shift frame of reference and also deal with resulting identity issues.

Recognise one's own cultural belonging
 How I communicate and what I communicate
 Which values do I transmit by telling my stories
 Starting from the knowledge of myself I know the others

Summary

Our project is based on some principles that are recapitulated below:

- 3 Socially mediated nature of mind
 - Focus on discursive interaction with others as a fundamental tool for reality construction
 - Focus on culture as
 - Repertoire of shared knowledge and behaviours

⁹ <http://stuwww.uvt.nl/~csmeets/PAGE3.HTM> (09.09)

¹⁰ Bennett, M. J. (1993) *Towards a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*, and Bennett, J. M. (2000) *Cultural Marginality: Identity Issues in Intercultural Training*, In: Paige R. M, *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth – ME:
<http://www.awesomelibrary.org/multiculturaltoolkit-stages.html> (09.09)

- Starting point for following construction of knowledge and behaviours.
- The psychological (cultural) model of human communication should be considered as a process by which participants “share meanings”
- Sharing meaning does not imply that people have the same mental representation about an event
- Sharing meaning entails that people look for a “common ground”

The individual functioning is affected by social context

The others' personal stories are helpful to understand their reality

To be interested in others is:

- Sharing knowledge of opinions and behaviours
- Starting point for building a new knowledge and to understand different behaviours
- Possibility of giving a common meaning to situations, experiences and projects.

Probably it is difficult to agree about the majority of ideas, but it is possible to build a common ground

In this relational dimension, involving people and institutions, it is fundamental to develop a common ground of agreement and comparison. Our empirical work tries out some strategies that go in this direction.

Target

(1 The actors involved) The people involved in this project are part of a specific group that was useful to carry out a *case study*.

- 6** At the beginning, the predicted situation considers three persons from three different generations, but coming from the same family.
- 7** The people involved talk about themselves
- 8** The main objective of each *case study* is the confrontation among the people involved.

The focus of the project is on the intercultural context and the intergeneration situations.

We are interested in words and facts, to point out personal values.

We are also concerned with the different forms of the stories. An analysis of the different methods of narrating a story could provide useful information, which later can be presented to the actors as feedback.

(2 Professionals within an intercultural context) The main intent of this research is to exert a method within the intercultural training. In particular, we aim at offering a method to meet and interview people who are seeking a contact person in the welcoming countries e.g.: cultural mediators, teachers, nurses, social workers...

ii. Analysis of the Problem

Change attitude

The confrontation in an intercultural context entails the necessity of assuming the others' standpoint:

- 9 Which opinions does the other have about his/her situation?
- 10 Which expectations does the other have towards me and the welcoming country?
- 11 How to identify a common communication field?

What are the possibilities to find related forms that allow us to live together? Logic of the meeting could be based on verifying if the opinions of the other coincide with mine, or if his /her judgment about a specific situation matches mine. The rationale behind this project is based on the narration of personal stories in order to let the opinions and reference values (mine and of the other) come out. Changing attitude has to do with the idea to assume the messages coming from the environment in a personal and creative way, which tends to cultural homologation, - with solidarity as a basic attitude, - with "plural thinking", - and to convey "plural sense" to experience; and the need to reconsider one's "self" in relation to different contexts - to perceive identity as a composite and relational one (that is to perceive "otherness" as a part of identity) - to establish "pro-active" relations with others - to develop an empathic relationship with others without identification - to value "difference" as a source for "new" and change.¹¹

Training of trainers and fieldworkers within an intercultural context: educators, cultural mediators, parent consultants, nurses, social workers, etc .

A part of the Parenting project and its resources was dedicated to an Action Research with the aim of offering new approaches to the training of trainers. In his book on the training of educators, Brookfield reviewed the efforts of Professor Bryson, who in 1936 taught at the first American faculty dedicated to the training of educators at the Columbia University Teachers College of New York. According to Bryson, educators should consider the "relation education, in which the study of emotions, attitudes and psychological habits would help us understand ourselves and our relations with others."¹²

Cyril O. Houle, previously quoted in the Parenting project, stated that "an individual confronted with the responsibility of becoming an educator of adults learns partly by process of participants and partly by his own examination of that process."¹³

¹¹ Comi. G. (2009) *Measure of the effects of an Intensive Program on the intercultural learning*, In: Onorati, M.G. (2009) ICIC Interdisciplinary Course on Intercultural Competences in the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union. (Report in progress)

¹² Brookfield, S. D. (1988). *Training educators of adults: the theory and practice of graduate adult education*. London and New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, p. 11

¹³ Houle, C. O. (1988) *The education of adult educational leaders* In: Brookfield, S. D. *Training educators of adults: the theory and practice of graduate adult education*. London and New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, p 114

We live in a multicultural situation.
It is necessary that we find an evaluation method to find out about our concepts of life and values and those of others.
With this, we enter a process that better understands our attitude towards a multicultural situation.
We hope to develop a model for further education for experts in an intercultural field of employment.

Now, we review a statement on teaching issues: “if a teacher does not change, he will leave a formative gap that cannot be filled.”¹⁴ This statement can also be used in a migration context where, in relation with the other and the otherness, we have to define new communication and “encounter” forms.

Our work proposal, based on telling stories, provides ideas of training to better prepare ourselves for the meeting with the other. It also helps to comprehend and define experiences of common planning.

iii. Intent

The purpose of this activity is to disclose significant experiences made by the person narrating the story. The hypothesis is that this procedure may encourage the identification of the ways of seeing, reading, and interpreting the reality that surrounds us. This process of disclosure could lead to the discovery of deep values that guide my life and his/her life, values that determine our opinions and choices.¹⁵

The aim of the project is to enhance intercultural competences in parenting educators and professionals who work with migrant families that include different generations and in unfavourable social situations.

“The complexity intrinsic in any intercultural situation must make us attentive to two elements. First of all, we must be *attentive* to all the ‘implicit’ that come with our acts and words. Because of the ‘implicit’, in an intercultural situation, we must be careful not to take for granted knowledge and beliefs that are part of our reference universe but are not necessarily part of the reference universe of the other. The difficulty consists in the fact that often we do not know which are the elements that we need to make explicit. At the same time, we must be open to accept that the other might refer to some ‘implicit’ that justify his answers even if we do not understand them right away. This remark leads us to underline the importance of developing a *friendly* posture. Such posture becomes imperative because often we cannot know exactly from where a communication difficulty originates: from a ‘mistake’ made by the other, or from our ‘misunderstanding’ about the assumptions of the exchange.

On this subject it might be useful to refer to the ‘charity principle’ that was developed by the American philosophers W.V.O Quine e D. Davidson during their reflections about issues within translation situations. This principle underlines the importance of adopting a ‘charitable’ attitude towards the other if faced with difficulties in a situation

¹⁴ Morcellini, M. (2006) *La comunicazione e i media nell'epoca del policentrismo formativo* In: Grange Sergi, T. e Onorati, M. G. *la sfida della comunicazione all'educazione*, Franco Angeli, Milano

¹⁵ The goal concerns the methodological aspect of the project. People involved were informed about the didactical purpose of the project and the anonymity of their stories, used only for this purpose.

of 'radical translation' ¹⁶. This attitude would help because within these situations it is difficult to understand whether the difficulty is not due only to our incapability of finding a proper translation, or of making explicit what is implicit."¹⁷
"The commonsense behind the maxim [the charity principle] is that one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation."¹⁸

Test communication strategies which should allow to train educators and social workers. Create meetings where people can get together and discuss attitudes as well as the values that are at the basis of their behavior. Enable the mutual understanding on an axiological level, avoiding cultural relativism but enhancing the awareness in one's beliefs and the necessity of being broadminded.

iv. Method

Subjective representations and social representations

In 1996, the 2nd Conference for social-cultural research celebrated the centennial of Jean Piaget and Lev S. Vygotskij's birth. During the conference it was stressed the importance of considering subjective and social representations as symbolic organisers between persons and groups ¹⁹.

Subjective representations are pragmatic schemes which support and facilitate the reasoning and activities of people. The search of consensus may lead to social representations, shared and accepted by members of a group.

Reflective practices

"Reflective practice aims for change: change in the environment, or in the learner's thinking and actions, or both. Action leading to change is seen as an important aspect in most reflective learning and is considered a way to test assumptions by practical or virtual experience."²⁰ Nevertheless, "while reflection-in-action gives rise to on the spot experiment, reflection on our past reflection-in-action may indirectly shape our future action."²¹

Narration

¹⁶ The situation of radical translation is a situation, imagined by Quine, in which an ethno linguist tries to communicate with a member of a population of which he knows neither the language nor the cultural characteristic. This encounter with a radical Alterity, later taken up also by Davidson, allows the highlighting of the difficulties intrinsic in every attempt of translation or cultural understanding. About this topic see Quine 1996 and Davidson 2005. For a presentation of the problem centred on the issue of knowledge of the Alterity see Bonoli, L. (2008). *Lire les cultures. La connaissance de l'altérité culturelle à travers les textes*, Kimé, Paris, chapter 2.2.

¹⁷ Comi G., Bonoli L. (2009) *L'interculturalità nella formazione. Quale ruolo per un istituto di formazione dei formatori?*, Cohep, Berna, Giornata di studio sulla Pedagogia dell'interculturalità

¹⁸ Quine, W. V. O. (1960), *Parola e oggetto*, ed. Saggiatore, Milano

¹⁹ Doise, W. (1996) *Psychologie et société: une problématique toujours actuelle*, In : Resumes of IInd Conference for social-cultural research

²⁰ Stroobants H. et al (2007) *Reflective Journeys. A fieldbook for Facilitating Life Long Learning in Vocational Educational and Training*, Leonardo Da Vinci Reflect project, Roma, p. 57

²¹ Schön, D. A. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

As we have seen, our approach aims at fostering reflection and sharing in the intercultural context. At this point, it is important to recapitulate the crucial elements of this approach: “The reflection can only begin when we have recreated the experience, whether observed or lived in narrative form.”²²

Therefore, when we let people tell their stories; we aim at creating a situation in which a reflection starts. Later, “What is important in collecting anecdotes is that one develops a keen sense of the point or cogency that the anecdote carries within it.”²³ For this reason, it is necessary to analyse the anecdote and then present one’s own reflection to the narrator in order to find a shared understanding of meaning and values, which the story carried within it.

Human beings are built culturally and they are carriers of their own story. This story coincides in part with the story of their initial group of belonging. Their story changes in time, integrating personal experiences, and transforms human beings *from a cultural product into a producer of culture*. This process develops during a whole lifetime. The ongoing mediation between the culture of origin, the mixture of different cultures, and life experiences leads to hybrid situations.

These situations need continuous adaptations and negotiations among different moral and legal frames. Here are some factors that change the individuals’ frame of values and that make the vision of the world and of oneself evolve:

- 1.1 Personal and familial history
- 1.2 Traditional practices and adaptation to new opportunities and fashions
- 1.3 Use of the mother tongue, use of other languages
- 1.4 Substitution of the mother tongue with the one of the welcoming country.



Figure 2: Human being, from a cultural product to a producer of culture

Categories

The collected anecdotes help us to identify significant categories for those who narrate the story and those who listen to it.

The choice of the theme, the repetitions of specific words, the underlining of elements are important aspects to take into account.

We also focus on the narrated events, emotions and character descriptions.

²² Chambers, et al (2005) *Narratives, Meaning-Making and Reflective Practice*, In: Colombo, M., *Riflessività e creatività nelle professioni educative: Una prospettiva internazionale*, Vita e pensieri, Milano

²³ Van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching Lived Experience*, SUNY, London

Secondly, we consider opinions, judgments and values that are expressed through the narration. The categories proposed by different authors are a useful support to enhance the development of a common communicative frame.

In the description of our concrete activities we use the image of “cultural glasses”. On the basis of the stories’ collection and the consequent discussion, we try to trace a map of the intercultural reality. It is a specific reality consisting of a narrator and a listener in a specific circumstance and place.

This common standpoint is the foundation on which a new tool of comprehension is based: the cultural glasses.

v. Outcome

The purpose of our Action Research is to offer training models for professionals who work in parenting and migration fields, but also the whole intercultural context could be “interested” in the outcome of this project.

We refer to different applications:

- 12 In migration and daily habits
- 13 In relations among generations
- 14 In relations between genres
- 15 Approach to religious beliefs and religious practices compared
- 16 In relations among people who play different roles (employer/worker, teacher/student, trainer/athlete and so on)
- 17 In relations among citizens and policymakers and citizens and support agencies

c. How to communicate with competence in an intercultural context

To define a communication competence in the intercultural context, it is necessary to aim at a degree of awareness. A state of awareness in the encounter with the other and the otherness should be based on a careful and conscientious *listening*.

In fact, the expression of feelings and beliefs has to do with the interpretation that one is able to give to reality. This skill is determined by individual factors such as intellectual potential or past experiences to which one can refer. This skill though is also determined by cultural factors that influence the individual:

- Limits not to be crossed, taboo themes not to be spoken about. Loyalty for one’s group of belonging, level of submission in front of political, religious or familial authorities.

Anyway, the description that comes from narrations is *always* determined by the rules of the game that have been agreed upon. The gathering of information, narrations, and testimonies is *always* based upon *reconstructions*. These reconstructions are determined by the context in which they are produced:

For example the story told to a policeman of the immigration centre will be different from the one told to the family who waits at home; or that will be written in a travel journal to be published in the community’s magazine. The intercultural situation offers, also in this case, a multiple logic. There is a need to refer to moral and legal frames that are often different and even contradictory. In these *crisis situations* the decision is about being loyal in different contexts:

- The community, the family, the welcoming society, the educational centre of one's children, the health system, the law!

Therefore, it is necessary to build with attention and conscience a shared communicative context considered useful by all actors.

d. From autobiography to the management of narrative interviews

“All of us are storytellers and we spend much of our life telling stories”. So, it is a useful strategy to collect these testimonies, but not only. In fact “a good story can be like a treasure chest whose full value is only revealed when we open the chest and look inside. What are the themes and patterns in the story? What characters and events move us most and why? What may our stories reveal about our hidden values, capacities and strengths?”²⁴

Consequently, the discussion following the storytelling allows us to take a step further into the reflection.

Stories and their importance in the intercultural communication:

- Stories communicate ideas holistically, conveying a rich yet clear message, and so they are an excellent way of communicating complicated ideas and concepts in an easy-to-understand form. Stories therefore allow people to convey tacit knowledge that might otherwise be difficult to articulate. In addition, because stories are told with feeling, they can allow people to communicate more than they realise they know.
- Storytelling provides the context in which knowledge arises as well as the knowledge itself, and hence can increase the likelihood of accurate and meaningful knowledge transfer.
- Stories are an excellent vehicle for learning, as true learning requires interest, which abstract principles and impersonal procedures rarely provide.
- Storytelling can help to make organisational communication more 'human' - not only do they use natural day-to-day language, but they also elicit an emotional response as well as thoughts and actions.
- Stories can nurture a sense of community and help to build relationships.
- People enjoy sharing stories - stories enliven and entertain.

Stories have always been vehicle for values. Starting from the sacred texts that are big adventure' stories useful to shape our minds to fairytales which propose roles, life choices , relations, dilemma and show what is good and what is evil.

We are convinced that people tell their stories also to show their values and beliefs.

²⁴ Weaver, C., De Brùn, C. (2005) *Storytelling*, Knowledge Management Specialist Library, NHS. www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement/ViewResource.aspx?resID=93580

“Every act of communication is also, from a certain point of view, an act of education”²⁵

2. Methodology

We outlined an operational frame.

“*One family and three histories. We ask to tell a part of the personal history*”. This story collection aimed at a confrontation in the family unit, while the whole procedure focused on the exchange among relatives to improve the intergenerational understanding. During this stage of the Parenting project, we gathered some stories with the aim of listening and rereading them in order to later identify some analysis categories. We also try to propose a feedback to discuss the pertinence with the person involved.

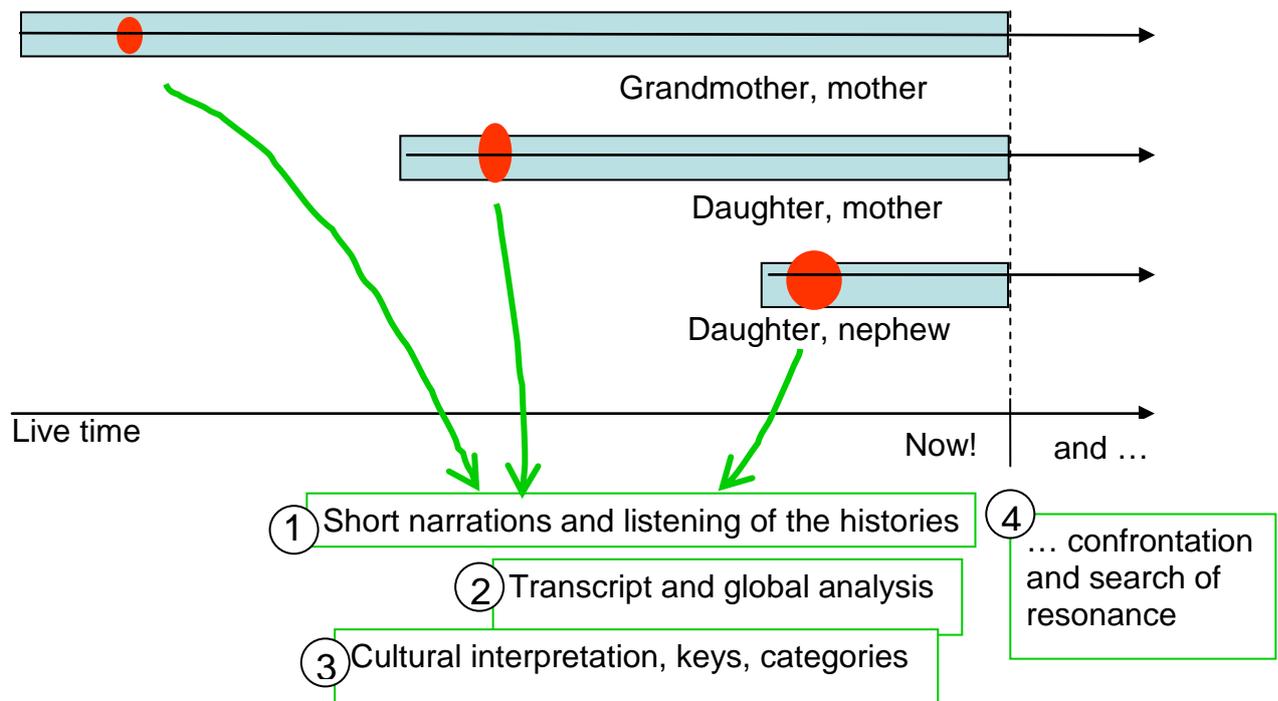


Figure 3: Three stories to find out some analysis' keys and to confront ourselves with the storyteller.

2.1 “The (four) steps”

The experience was structured in four distinct steps

1. Short narrations
2. Concentrated listening - notation
3. Concentrated analysis - cultural interpretation
4. Feedback, confrontation, resonance - reflective loop

The definite setting was quite simple.

²⁵ Augustine of Hippo (254 - 450) *De Magistro*, <http://www.augustinus.it/italiano/maestro/index2.htm>

2.1.1 Short narrations

We contact the person and provide information about the work that is being carried out:

- Information about the project that we are working on
- Information about the didactic – methodology of the project
- The privacy of the data is clarified; the internal use of it and the precaution of making it completely anonymous
- It is also explained that the matter of interest is spontaneous memories
- The meeting takes place at a venue chosen by the person involved and the story is recorded
- Only at that moment the period of life to remember is clarified
- It is avoided to have other people around in order to have a private meeting, concentrating exclusively on the person involved
- Introduction of the activities to the people involved:
“Our work takes place in many countries of the European Union and its goal is to ameliorate our knowledge of migrant families and their situation. We would like to hear about your story, for this reason we ask you to tell us what you remember of when you were about 10-12 years old.”

2.1.2 Concentrated listening - notation

A transcript of the text is made and then discussed by the researchers, in presence or not (online or by phone).

- We consider the temporal and cultural aspects, the situation that has been told and the biographical elements
- We consider the context of the story, the influence of specific groups, the actions portrayed, the roles and the interpersonal relations
- We consider the concepts described in the story, talking about the relations processed in the community of belonging, stating choices and convictions
- We consider the construction of the story, its linearity, the recurring of themes, the verbal underlining, the emotions expressed

The discussion about the text allows the two researchers to listen to the interpretation of the other, to describe and write “directly in the text”, interacting in this way with the story and its writing.

2.1.3 Concentrated reading, cultural interpretation

We identify significant elements that probably have to do with the profound convictions and the reference values of the person involved.

We formulate hypotheses, with the prospect of discussing them with the person who offered his or her story.

2.1.4 Confrontation and resonance

We organise a feedback meeting and the interpretations are discussed, seeking confirmations, clarifications or further developments of the analysis. This way we offer the chance to go back to the story, to increase the awareness of how one tells a story and why a specific anecdote was chosen.

This passage favours a contextualization of the story within the “here and now”, in the present from which one rebuilt a moment of his or her life, to talk about oneself.

3. Practical experiences on two levels

The following part on experience describes the process and the results of the transnational work with our project partners.

We furthermore give an example of our method by displaying a selected interview.

3.1 Transnational partner work

During the first interviews in Germany and Switzerland we introduced our partners to our research work in order to give them the opportunity to accompany the process. We made sure that they were able to conduct an interview in their country as well. (Invitation and implementation guide are attached)
Meanwhile our work continued and we gathered the first stories.

3.1.1 The empirical approach: first data

The feedback of our partners was prompt and this invited us to carry on. Austria responded that they would conduct an interview as well
At last we had recourse to data from four case studies:

Austria:	One Case Study with 2 persons (mother and daughter)
Germany.	One Case Study with 3 persons (grandmother, mother and daughter)
Switzerland:	Two Case Studies with 3 persons (grandmother, mother and daughter)

Appeals and short narrations – setting

It was necessary for our partners that we gave them a structure and requirements :

Structure and requirements

1. Chose a family unit within which three generations are represented: grandmother or grandfather, daughter or son, granddaughter or grandson.
2. Plan the three meetings in the mother tongue of the family unit chosen or in the language spoken in their country. Estimate 10-15 minutes per person.

Settings

Each person is interviewed separately; the order of the interviews does not matter.
The stories have to be recorded and transcribed.

The material has to be sent to the keyperson (Germany)

It is important to briefly portray the context of life, background and the situation of the family unit that has been chosen.

Introduction of the activities to the people involved (grandparents, sons/daughters, grandchildren)

“Our work takes place in many countries of the European Union and its goal is to ameliorate our knowledge of migrant families and their situation.

We would like to hear about your story, for this reason we ask you to tell us what you remember about when you were about 10-12 years old.”

At this point it is necessary to leave a bit of time to the interviewee for the memories to surface. Sometimes people talk about something else: about when they were younger, or about their present life. Normally, within a minute they start talking about when they were 10-12 years old.

At the end of the story it is possible to ask a few questions if necessary or if the following areas have not yet been mentioned:

- free time and games
- homes and places of their life
- friends
- relatives
- school
- work

Attention: if after a minute a person still does not begin to talk about the topic, he/she might need a little help.

It is important to have the patience to wait for the memories to surface.

Should it be necessary, we can suggest thinking about games and free time (it is an informal allusion).

Should further help be needed, we can suggest thinking of places or friends.

Should these suggestions not be enough, we can suggest thinking of family or school.

- Should suggestions be necessary they should be given in order from least formal (free time) to most formal (work)

In every instance it is important to transcribe each and every sentence.

It is important to keep the voice record.

All documents are treated anonymously.

3.2 Example

To adequately describe the next individual steps, we will in the following limit ourselves to the evaluation of a single interview

Example Case study: family tree from Austria: *mother and daughter*

Introduction to the *mother* as described above and request:

“Tell us about a time in your life when you were about 10-12 years old”

i. Concentrated listening - notation

The interviewer (partner in Austria) listened to the story for 10 minutes (voice recorder) and took notes. It was important to have the patience to wait for the memories to surface. Help was barely necessary in the form of any suggestion.

M. - Migrant, Serbian, came to Austria at the age of 16. The interviewed daughter was born and raised in Austria.

Interview 04.03.09 with M. (Mother): anonymised

C: Also M., du kommst ja ursprünglich aus ____ hast du gesagt, oder?

M: Ja, aus ____, also aus dem südlichen Teil und das ist ____.

C: Das ist ____, okay. Kannst du mir ein bisschen beschreiben, wie du aufgewachsen bist und wo genau?

M: Ja, ich bin in einem ländlichen Gebiet aufgewachsen, ursprünglich haben die Menschen vor dem zweiten Weltkrieg dort eben gelebt von Landwirtschaft und Vieh betreiben, also Schafe und Kühe, ja. Nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg wurde viel Land nationalisiert, was auch meine Familie betroffen hat und es war nicht mehr viel Land zu bearbeiten, also war es irgendwie, hat uns die Armut sehr betroffen. Und diese Gegend war ein bisschen ausgeschlossen, es wurde wenig investiert oder gemacht und wir haben eben mit dem wenigen auskommen müssen.

C: Und was haben deine Eltern dann gemacht?

M: Also meine Eltern haben - , wie ich geboren worden bin, habe ich in einer Großfamilie gelebt mit 30 Personen, also mein Großvater hatte sechs Söhne und wir haben alle zusammen gelebt bis alle geheiratet haben, bis sie sechs Häuser gebaut haben, sechs Stalls und dann haben sie sich getrennt und jeder hat dann ein kleines Stück Land bekommen, eine Kuh oder zwei, ein paar Schafe und so haben wir dann gelebt von der kleinen Landwirtschaft.

Landwirtschaft und Vieh betreiben, also Schafe und Kühe, ja. Nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg wurde viel Land nationalisiert, was auch meine Familie betroffen hat und es war nicht mehr viel Land zu bearbeiten, also war es irgendwie, hat uns **die Armut sehr betroffen**. Und diese Gegend war ein bisschen ausgeschlossen, es wurde wenig investiert oder gemacht und wir haben eben mit dem wenigen auskommen müssen.

Flashback to Cyprus

Viel existentiell und auch politische vision, mit Gefühl auch Betroffenheit, existentiell

C: Und was haben deine Eltern dann gemacht?

M: Also meine Eltern haben - , wie ich geboren worden bin, habe ich in einer **Großfamilie gelebt mit 30 Personen**, also mein Großvater hatte sechs Söhne und wir haben alle zusammen gelebt bis alle geheiratet haben, bis sie sechs Häuser gebaut haben, sechs Stalls und dann haben sie sich getrennt und jeder hat dann ein kleines Stück Land bekommen, eine Kuh oder zwei, ein paar Schafe und so haben wir dann gelebt von der kleinen **Landwirtschaft**. Aber damals haben dann die Leute angefangen eben ins Ausland zu gehen, Arbeit zu suchen und so ist **mein Vater** in den 70er Jahren so wie viele andere als **Gastarbeiter** nach Deutschland gegangen. Und teilweise **Geld nach Hause geschickt** und teilweise uns vergessen, so mussten wir dort mehr oder weniger ums **Überleben** kämpfen.

Großfamilie,
Landwirtschaft

existentiell
breite
Vision,
soziale
Vision



C: Du hast ja noch Geschwister..

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First results from our reading, discussion and analysis in this example:

Viel existentielle und auch politische Vision, mit Gefühl auch Betroffenheit existentiell	Much existential and also political vision with emotion and also existential concern
Großfamilie	Extended family
Landwirtschaft	Agriculture
Existentiell	Existential
Breite Vision	Broad vision
Soziale Vision	Social vision

Summarising, we found three essential elements:

- 1. Political and social points of view, existence (only boys were allowed to go to school, everyone was poor, the government invested too little into the region)**
- 2. Duties, rules imposed from outside, tradition (the mother dared to send the daughter to school)**
- 3. Poverty (toys of poverty)**

ii. Resonance and reflective loop

From the keys of reading to the conception of life:

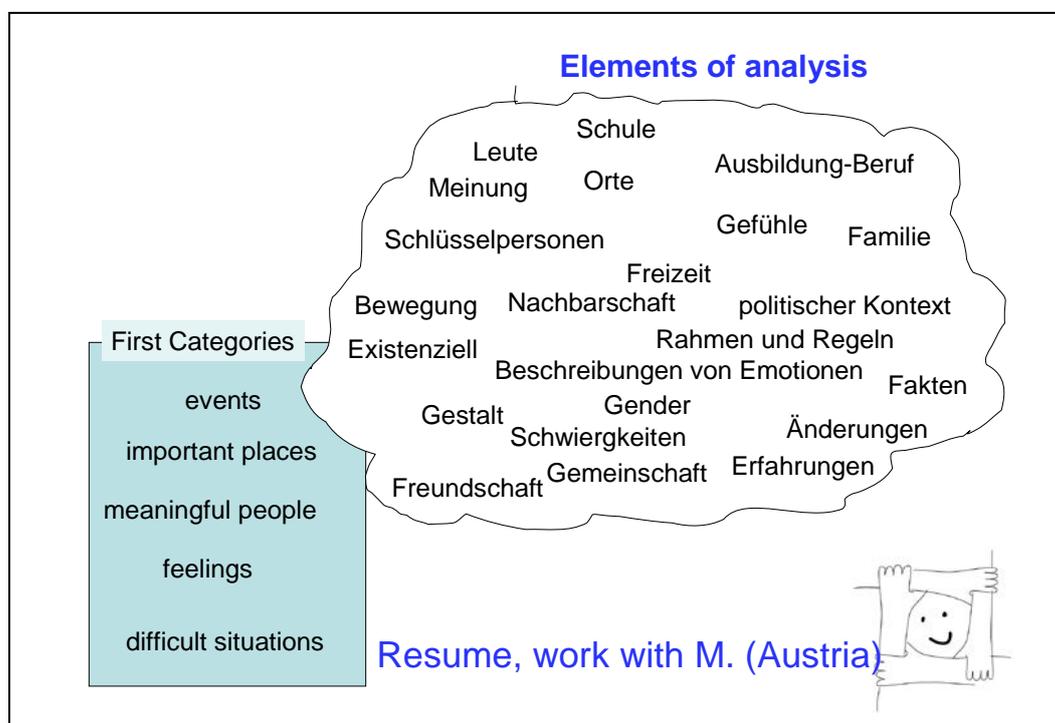
It was important for us now to confront M. with our “interpretation” – could it be that our contemplative and comprehending reading with “different glasses” brought us closer to M.? Do the elements we found match with the cultural history? Are these elements perhaps also present now and influence M’s concept of life?

When we confronted M. with the elements we found she was very astonished and her first reaction was: “This is great what you found out!” She then told us about her private situation and her job in the kindergarten. She confirmed everything we found out. This was the first time her concept of life was presented to her in a straight forward and focalised way. The feedback (a perfect accordance) was astounding to us.

After we had analysed the other interviews we became more distinct in the different categories/elements of the analysis:

Elements of the analysis

Categories



Elements of analysis:

“school, peer group, family, friendship, apprenticeship - profession, leisure time, citizen, neighbourhood, political context, framework and rules, gender, changes/alterations, descriptions of emotions, facts, places, people, feelings, difficulties, community, experiences, movement (activity), shape, opinion, words, language, religion, culture, habit, key figures, existential, power, powerlessness.”

b. Next steps “from assumption to affirmation”

From Action Research to comparison

In the first step we intended to create a common room to design a new culture of listening and understanding between the cultures at an equitable level.

We have the opinion that communication in an intercultural context is in need of a new or rediscovered culture of listening.

For the next step we can work on the temporal level. By choosing of the generation model we are able to analyse various life-time data. We make use of the generative aspect – we read in terms of time and places.

As a next step we consider that the different generations will read each other's interviews – there can be a cross-generation discussion among the participants. By

confronting them with the three stories changes in life concepts and values can be analysed.

c. Recommendations

We tested these first steps of our method for a year and received good feedback and attracted interest from all participants. To prove the method and to extend it further data needs to be collected and the aspect of for example “gender” needs to be taken into consideration.

However, it is a simple method to analyse intercultural situations in a quite easy manner and to sharpen the professionals’ views and understandings.

Our frontier is where deeper psychological topics are concerned (we want to emphasise that our research work is not aimed at an in-depth psychological analysis of cultures or individuals).

Sensitivity is needed where interviewees from war zones or scenes of disaster are concerned.

4. Conclusion – Continuation

Our contribution “Approaches to cultural awareness” aimed at creating an idea, a method, and a means of help to deal with different cultures and provide a basis for mutual understanding in the context of intercultural communication.

In retrospect, considering the first beginnings of our theories, the following can be said:

We think that the method of narrative interviewing allows a greater opportunity of real participation of the interviewees and a greater voluntariness and confidence to tell us what is important in their life.

We can also confirm in an intercultural context that peoples’ personal stories are fundamental and that a positive form of communication is achieved by narrating in a common room. This positive communication leads to a common well-being!

We can corroborate as well that the mind is essentially a social product and develops through social interaction and communicative processes and in a “cross-generation” way.

Listening and reading with empathy, reading with “different glasses”, brought us closer to people and different cultures and sharpened our manner of perception and valued “difference” as a source for “new” and change.

We would like to continue our Action Research idea with European partners from the parenting project. We can involve other cultures and empower parents as “specialists”- this fits perfectly to the idea of “Empowerment” in our parenting project! They can examine their own cultural and individual self-concept.

We think it indispensable to provide advanced training in the course of the professionalising of specialists in intercultural situations (compare “what is an intercultural situation?”), which focuses on exactly these themes.

We can imagine to design a guidebook in cooperation with our European partners, which step-by-step describes the method presented.

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