

# **DEMYSTIFYING THE OTHER - INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT THROUGH CROSSING BORDERS ACTIVITIES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

As the genesis of conflicts seem to stem from a deep fear for the stranger, it is vital that people meet, interact, demystify and discover the human nature of one another. In this way, the other will mirror our own self. To be sure, in addition to fear as the original sin of human conflict, the deep rooted straightforward interpretations concerning monotheistic concepts of “good versus evil” and the former will prevail over the latter is another dangerous source of permanent search and need for an enemy. This narrow perspective builds on either us or them rather than us and them together.

Here lies the very importance of meeting, interacting, learning to live and to accept the necessity and beauty of cultural diversity, which could be as important as the biological diversity of the universe. Once the other gets a face like our own, then there will be less cause for anxiety and fear for that other. Reduced fear of the other is at the core of intercultural conflict resolution, management and transformation towards intercultural, understanding and counselling. Xenophobia is often created and sustained by misinformation, ignorance and harmful generalisation. Perhaps, this is why people still travel thousands of miles to meet and discuss issues. Even the most technologically super advanced companies with teleconference facilities still organise meetings for people to have face to face encounters. Darren Roberst argues that, “With face to face meeting, the following will generally become known in the space of a short amount of time: grammar, appearance, punctuality, tone, dress code, age, sex . . . , self-image, self-confidence, attitudes, permanent injuries etc.” The author continues, “Anything that one can pick up with sight, smell, touch, feel and audibility. All the five senses come into play here.” (Darren Roberts: [www.powerhomebiz.com/index/powercd.htm](http://www.powerhomebiz.com/index/powercd.htm)). Hence, the most effective way to reduce and eliminate xenophobia is the demystification of the other, the stranger and enemy through direct meeting, dialogue and cooperation on equal terms. It is not enough just to have the dominant and the dominated groups to meet for the latter to make exotic food and dances for the former to enjoy and get thrilled by how sweet the natives or immigrants are and how colourful their culture is. For the encounter to be mutually meaningful, the different groups must jump into the fire or cold water together, learning some useful knowledge, skills, produce and/or create useful outcome together as equal participants. In this regards, the public Service Commission of Canada argues that “(Stereotypes can change when members of different social groups increase their interaction with each other. Through interaction, false/negative stereotypes can be disproven. For instance, people may believe that members of some groups are generally lazy without believing that any of the members of these groups whom they know personally are lazy. In order for increased interaction to be effective in changing stereotypes, certain conditions must be met:

- there must be an equality of status among the group members (Gergen & Gergen);

- group members should participate equally in working together toward common goals (Gergen & Gergen); the contact between the group should be intimate and varied, rather than superficial or merely frequent (Stephan & Rosenfield);
- relevant authority figures must lend their support to the change process (Stephan & Rosenfield)". (Jelking and Sajous, 1995).

An example of these kinds of intercultural encounters form the basic idea of Crossing Borders through which Arab and Israeli youth and educators meet across the conflict divide. Although based on the same concept, the youth programme is different both in contents and format from the teachers' programme. The former focuses on basic conflict analysis and management tools, basic communications and journalism skills, while the teachers' programme focuses more on intercultural knowledge, understanding and pedagogical skills aimed at helping the teachers respond to and effectively deal with conflict related problems their pupils and students face. Thus, instead of focusing on the conflict that divides their societies, the point of departure and focus is on what the youth aged between 16 and 20 needs, interests and concerns that they have in common. Among the common interests are to be part of the search for lasting peace in the region, to have their voices heard, acquire modern media and communication skills as well as through sports, music and the Internet all of which will help them do well at school. For the teachers programme, participating Arab and Israeli teachers come from social science backgrounds. Whether they are Palestinian, Israeli or Jordanian, they all have typical teachers' problems and challenges like dealing with students, administration and the impact of the conflicts on their pupils and students, lack of resources, time and space constrains. In their meeting, the teachers across the conflict divide have plenty to discuss, learn from one another's ideas and experiences in dealing and coping with such typical teachers problems. In the following pages, the concept, activities and methods of Crossing Borders will be described as an example of positive intercultural meeting on equal terms for mutual benefit that can be applied in various crosscultural/intercultural encounters and cooperation activities towards common goals.

### **Approaches to intercultural conflict management**

Before addressing the different types of conflicts and appropriate approach to each, it is important to make it clear that conflict is part of life, every change, development and growth. As such, it is safe to claim that conflict is not bad per se. Furthermore, to dispel possible confusion between conflict and violence, below is a brief definition of conflict and what differentiates it from violence.

- Conflict is a relationship between two or more individuals or groups who have or think they have incompatible goals. Or it is a difference between two or more people that can lead to tensions and violence
- Violence consists of actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems that cause physical, psychological, social, cultural or environmental damage and/or prevent people from reaching their full (positive) human potentials. (Fisher et al, 2003)

### **Different ways of looking at a conflict**

Traditionally conflicts were looked upon as something

- objective with a right solution
- involving individual opponents who put the blame on each other
- win-lose situation with legitimate use of overt and covert power: all is fair in love and war.
- disturbing situation to be removed

However, now experts tend to look upon conflict as a situation:

- in which nobody has monopoly on the truth
- involving different individual or groups in mutual conflict
- a process that may lead to lose-lose, win-lose or win-win depending on how it is managed.
- a human reality, in every society, that must be dealt with
- involving active parties that share the responsibility of the situation

### **Different types of conflicts and appropriate approach to each**

Whether a conflict is within or between groups, the general approach to conflict should be to acknowledge the existence of a conflict, identify the real issues, hear the different points of views, help the parties to find ways of resolving the conflict together, reach agreement on and responsibility for the agreement and schedule a follow up meeting to review the resolution. (Chang, 1994)

### **Suggestions for approaching different types of conflicts**

- **Instrumental conflict**, which is about tangible issues, means, methods, procedures and structures. The appropriate approach to this type of conflict seems to be problem solving to reach resolution through negotiation, bargaining and compromise.
- **Conflict of interest**, which is about allocation of time, money, labour, space etc. The appropriate approach to this type of conflict seems to be direct negotiation between the parties or through their representatives to reach agreement.
- **Personal conflict**, which is about identity, self worth, loyalty, breach of confidence, rejection etc. The appropriate approach to this conflict is open communication and transparency for mutual understanding of the underlying needs, fears, interest and positions taking by the parties. Needs are what each party believe they cannot do without, interests are what each party really wants to have while positions are what each party says or declares that they must have, do or not do.
- **Conflict of values**, which is about religion, politics, ideologies and other deep beliefs. As these deep values are not for negotiation or compromise, the most appropriate approach to this type of conflict is honest and ongoing dialogue for deeper mutual understanding and accepting the right for all to be different.

- Finally, rule number one in approaching conflict is to involve the parties to the conflict in the whole process from the start to implementation, and evaluation of the outcome. In this way, they can own the outcome and hopefully share the responsibility to build and sustain good relationship both within and between the groups.

### **The focus of this article**

This article will describe Crossing Borders basic ideas, programmes for youth and teachers as a method to address intercultural conflicts through demystifying the other. The article will furthermore argue that meeting, learning, studying and cooperation on common interests as a team (production, creation, problem solving, simulation, role plays etc) on neutral ground and on equal terms will ultimately put a human face on the other (the enemy). Such experience from joint activities in absolute equality will act as a positive step towards intercultural counselling. Immediate benefits in terms of self-confidence, acquiring new and useful social skills and cultural competencies and expanded social network do generate positive experience and healthy personal development.

### **Background**

Crossing Borders started in 1999 by Garba Diallo in Elsinore, Denmark, with the aim of supporting dialogue among young people and teachers/educators in the Middle East. Crossing Borders is therefore an extension of the Learning to Live Together in Middle East seminar that was initiated in 1994 following the historic Oslo accord between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Between 1994 and 1998 educators from Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia met each summer for two weeks with the aim of getting to know one another, how their respective education systems presented the conflict and how they as educators could contribute to the peace process. In 1999 the seminar was transformed into a project called Crossing Borders whose main activities were to take place in the region as much as the situation allows.

### **The core ideas and assumptions of the Crossing Borders**

The idea of Crossing Borders is based on the belief that in an increasingly globalising world, living, working and learning in a multicultural environment is becoming the rule rather than the exception.

Thus, it is assumed that it is no longer just useful, but necessary life skills for people to acquire multicultural awareness, knowledge, understanding and skills. In order to achieve such knowledge and competences, it is not enough to just read or debate about other people, cultures and places. It is necessary to meet, interact, learn, work and create/produce together with counterparts across physical, cultural and especially psychological borders. It is about entering into dialogue on equal premises and jumping into the mud together. In conclusion of the paper, I will argue for using cross borders activities as an approach to conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution, management, transformation, communication and mutual understanding in a globalising world. As such, the concept of Crossing Borders is not just limited to geographical borders, but especially the more problematic psychological, gender; professional, social, economic and generational divides etc.

If we dare to observe what is going on around the world today, it is easy to see that geographic proximity, centuries of contact, trade, shared natural resources, increased knowledge, supersonic air transportation, instant communication and material accumulation have not eliminated misperceptions and other barriers within the world let alone the Middle East. Peaceful coexistence, the free meeting of people and cultural exchange and cooperation across cultural boundaries cannot yet be taken for granted.

Moreover, the alleged transformation of the world into a single global market has not translated into mutual understanding, appreciation, acceptance, respect for cultural diversity as a positive and necessary source for individual and collective development. Nor has increased wealth and knowledge resulted in more solidarity within and between nations.

This is a serious problem that cannot be ignored, or be resolved at the official level alone. Official interventions need to be combined with sustained contact, dialogue and cooperation at the grass roots as well as educational level that can demonstrate that people on all sides have more in common than what we see on the television and in other mass media. As Eichhorn et al. (2001) assert

- Direct experience is the best way to begin to learn any culture
- Differences can be like a threat at first, we tend to overlook similarities and notice just the differences when we first begin to interact with members of other culture, even though we

all share the 98% of the same DNA and we are all far more alike than we are different, but that is easy to forget in the beginning

- Stereotyping due to overgeneralisation is a common occurrence, especially among those who only interact with other cultures infrequently; there is always more variation within groups than there is between them.
- For precisely the reason described above, our own cultural identities are not apparent to us until we begin to interact with others who have different backgrounds
- Finally, cultures are always changing, especially as they interact with each other (Eichhorn et al. 2001).

Experiences from around the world have shown that face-to-face dialogue meetings on equal terms do help foster better understanding and mutual respect across borders. The more people meet, the more they discover how much they have in common and therefore the less they live in fear for the unknown across the street or on the other side of the neighbourhood or border.

In terms of the protracted and multifaceted Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East, top-down political peace accords without popular participation have not been effective enough. For such peace accords to be realised and sustained, they have to be inclusive. It is essential to involve the people in the whole process. For an area like the Middle East where two thirds of the population are under 25, it is also a matter of justice and inclusive democracy to include the voices of the youth and educators. Youth are the future of society and educators are the ones who primarily prepare the youth for their local and global citizenship development. Another reason for choosing youth as the target group is because they are in their formative age that makes them more receptive, more open and eager to learn. Perhaps more than any other generation before, youth of today have many identities spanning from personal, local to global. Their multifaceted identities are akin to the different layers of an onion. With the modern telecommunication technologies, they are also more connected across borders than other generations ever before.

For pupils and students, teachers remain to the most important multipliers of information, ideas, knowledge, values and attitudes. The aim of the programme is to develop crosscultural competence and networking among teachers. Reaching and training one teacher means reaching many learners, readers and future members of society. Therefore choosing teachers and educators is a conscious

recognition of education as the key to developing positive citizenship both at local, national and global levels. Through educators, intercultural understanding and respect for the other side can be enhanced and promoted.

As educators, the target group act as a role model for their students and pupils. Their active participation is believed to poster community interested in entering into dialogue with fellow community members from other cultural groups.

## The development of the Crossing Borders concept and methods

The concept, methods and programmes of Crossing Borders have been inspired by the author's personal experience and professional development in living, studying and working in various multicultural contexts. Among others the Danish folk high school system, extensive reading and lifelong learning, teaching at the International People's College (IPC) in Denmark as well as giving lectures and training to multicultural groups and international development workers combined with the author's deep interest and experience in the Middle East have been the main driving force to develop Crossing Borders (Lawson, 1996). In the following, the factors and sources of the underlying principles behind the concepts and methods Crossing Borders will be introduced. (Diallo, 1999)

## The personal dimension

The author explains: "I was born in 1956 to a cross-border Fulani family in a small village of 6-8 households in Southern Mauritania, West Africa. I was brought up according to Fulani education with 4 elder sisters, one elder brother and two younger brothers. Like all the other inhabitants of the village my parents had never made it to school. No one could read or write in any language. When some members of the colonial tribe came to demand tax money, they had to speak to the people through interpreters. With lots of cattle herds, we thought of ourselves as rich, free like birds and proud of our self-reliance and symbiotic relations with our local environment. People believed in the concept of unity in diversity; united in life by being integral part of the universe and united in humanity as part of the same human race while diverse in cultural, religion, languages, lifestyles and outlook. Diversity is the rule, monoculturalism the exception. People were very sceptical of

western schools and believed that what their kids would gain at school was not worth what they could lose there. Therefore, none of my brothers or sisters was expected to go to school. Thus, I was running around with the cows like a cow boy until I was 15, when one day a school from the nearest town visited our village. The school consisted of some 50 boys, all of them with kaki shorts, plastic shoes, white shirts and caps. They were marching and singing in a strange language. I got excited and begged my father to send me to school. Few days later I was on a camel behind my father with three milking cows running in front of the camel. One cow was for the school fee; the second was for my host family and third was for my subsistence allowance.

On the following day I was made to join the crowd of hundreds of black and brown boys, all struggling to speak in a strange foreign tongue: French. The rule of the school was that no local “vernacular” was allowed in the arbitrary schoolyard, with no walls or fences nor clear limits. The angry teachers could always trap us down and punish us for using the “tribal” language. In addition to the language torture, the entire content of the education system was about foreign people, places, things, ideas, values and over glorified foreign history and against our own culture and identity. This made me join the others to create an underground cell to learn and teach our mother tongues, which was illegal (Diallo, 1993). I started to despise the system and sneak back home until I finally dropped out and began to look for ways out of the country to get education of my own choice. When I was 19, I found my way to the Gulf State of Qatar where I spent ten years between 1976 and 1986 to study and work. After earning BA and education degree in 1986, I left for Norway where I worked in the health system and Red Cross while I took courses in political sciences, international relations, environment and development, computer science, British and American studies courses as well as taking a diploma at the Oslo Teachers Training. At the same time, I was very active in immigrant advocacy and became chairperson of the pan-African society of Norway and gave lectures on the impact of ethnic conflicts in the African Sahel with special focus on Mauritania and the Sudan. In one of my lecture tours to Stockholm in 1990, I met Professor Dani Nubudere from Uganda, who was at the time teaching African and international studies at the International People’s College IPC in Elsinore. He invited me to 1991 IPC International Summer course to give a lecture on the Afro-Arab conflicts in Mauritania and the Sudan.”

### **The Danish Folk High School**

The author continues: “In 1992, I was offered to join the IPC staff and teach African, Middle East and Sustainable Development Studies. It was here at the IPC, with students and faculty staff from

over 30 countries, including Chinese and Tibetans, Arab and Israelis, Black, white and mixed South Africans, Japanese, Koreans, Croats, Serbs, Bosnians and Albanians and so on, I saw the power of direct interaction, living, studying and working together on equal terms as the most important step towards intercultural knowledge, understanding and peaceful coexistence. Here students from the age of 18 upwards make the choice to come and experience living in and learning in a multicultural context where established stereotypes break down and people start to see and treat each other as individuals and consequently find out that not all Japanese could make a camera in their kitchen, not all Americans eat Mc Donald's food and most importantly they learn that the differences within groups are often more than the differences between groups. They also learn that the various types of intelligences, wisdoms and knowledge are equally distributed across individual and cultural groups on the globe. There are no such things as culture X being more intelligent than culture Z. Studying in such a stimulating environment has a double benefit. Students learn to know more about themselves, their cultures through the others while they learn about other cultures and value systems of their fellow students and teachers. Here, learning takes place all over all the time. For more on the Danish folk high school, the *Land of the Living* by Steven M. Borish is a comprehensive source book on this liberal adult education system (Borish, 1991)

### Learning to Live Together in the Middle East Seminars

As soon as the historic handshake between the late Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and president Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accord in Sept 1993, it was thought the folk high school would be a perfect neutral place to bring Israeli and Palestinian educators to learn to know one another and how they as educators could contribute to the search for peace in their war-torn Holy Land. Thus, between 1994 and 1998, each summer 40 Arab and Israeli educators participated in seminars where they together learnt about each other with the aim of developing educational ideas, activities, methods and programmes that could serve as modules for peaceful coexistence education. The Crossing Borders youth and educators' programmes have been developed based on the experience from the Learning to Live Together seminars. (Diallo, 1998)

The author's own natural thirst for learning and discovering got a big boost and inspiration from teaching multicultural groups of students with rich and varied personal, academic backgrounds and life experiences. This inspired him to discover and extensively read books and other learning

materials on the subject of intercultural communication and cooperation. This created a positive chain reaction that each book he read led him to discover more books to read. At the end of this article, there is a list of reading recommendations.

## The main activities of Crossing Borders

Crossing Borders activities are divided into two programmes. The original and most developed programme is that of the youth programme. Due to the success of the youth programme, teachers and educators whose pupils and students that have participated in the youth programme got inspired and express interest in having a programme of their own. Thus, while the youth programme started in the 1999, the teachers' programme began in early this year. In the following pages the two programmes are described separately in details.

### The youth programme

Since its inception in October 1999, the main activity of Crossing Borders youth programme consists of the annual two-week training courses for a new batch of 40 young Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian youth recruited by their local coordinators. Due to its length and the necessity for good facilities on neutral ground, the course takes place in Denmark. During the course the participants receive intensive training in conflict management, intercultural communication skills, basic journalism and the role of the media. This provides them with a framework to engage in creative dialogue while living, studying and working together on the production of a magazine. The course concludes with the publication of the magazine as a concrete end product that the participants take home.

The other main activity of Crossing Borders comprises four-day follow-up seminars for the participants of the previous summer course. The seminars are held in November and March in Turkey. The seminars also act as a neutral forum to meet and keep in touch, receive further training in conflict management, communications and journalism. In addition, the seminars ensure the participants are able to share and exchange information on ongoing developments in their region and how the conflict is affecting them and their respective communities. They also get a chance to evaluate the previous activities and editions of the magazine, and write individual and joint articles for the upcoming editions. Since its inception in 1999, Crossing Borders has trained some 350 young prospective journalists from Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. The Crossing Borders magazine is now in its 24<sup>th</sup> edition. Five 2-week summer courses and ten regional seminars in Turkey have been implemented by the end of 2004.

As an educational framework to bring and keep the youth active in Crossing Borders, the publication and distribution of the bi-monthly magazine constitute a vital activity. Entirely written by and for youth in the Middle East, the magazine is distributed to high schools, youth clubs, community centres and other organisations working on and/or interested in the region. One of the most interesting and challenging methods CB has developed is joint article writing. The young people are trained and coached to write joint articles on hot issues such as the separation wall, checkpoints, suicide bombing, Jerusalem, Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. During the seminars, the youth exchange draft articles for mutual feedback and critiques. Having joint articles published in the magazine encourages joint ownership, responsibility and interest in getting the magazine distributed and read across the conflict divide.

The magazine's editorial board consists of the four local (Israeli, Palestinian, Arab Israeli and Jordanian) coordinators. The position of editor in chief rotates among the coordinators. The coordinators are also responsible for the recruitment of participants, organisation of uni-national meetings, collection of articles and distribution of the magazine, and networking in their respective sectors.

### The teachers' programme

Like the youth programme, the basic aim of Crossing Borders Teachers (educators) programme is to encourage healthy dialogue and enhance understanding and cooperation among teachers across borders on equal terms. This is done by providing a neutral and stimulating space where participating teachers receive special training. While the youth training focuses on basic conflict management, communication and media skills, the teachers' seminars address pedagogical and intercultural skills and competences, while sharing experiences and exchanging views on pedagogical and intercultural issues affecting their societies. The programme comprises two week summer seminars in Denmark; four day workshops in Turkey, uni-national meetings in each sector and two reunion meetings in Jerusalem plus the publication of an educational journal by the participants for general distribution throughout their schools and communities and beyond.

### Two Summer Seminars

The Summer Seminars are held during the teachers' summer holidays. The seminars give the teachers unique opportunities to increase their knowledge, expand their regional networks, renew

their existing skills and acquire the latest crosscultural competences together. As the first encounter with participants from the other side, the seminars take place on neutral ground and in a stimulating educational setting. In such a learning environment, the participants are able to learn about each other through sharing personal experiences. They do also learn about themselves and their educational systems through the others' eyes. The outcome of such interaction and exchange does broaden educators' personal horizons and professional competence.

In order to ensure maximum diversity, participants are recruited from different schools and regions, balance in terms of gender, religion, age, social background and nationality. The key criteria for selection are based on individual interest in dialogue and cooperation with fellow teachers from other cultures. To further emphasise balance, the common language of the programme and the educational journal is English.

The main theme of the teachers programme is educators' contribution to intercultural exchange and cooperation across. Their contribution is achieved through interactive dialogue, mutual learning and joint production of cultural and educational programmes. Another aspect of such contribution is the critical exploration and analysis of how their respective educational systems and media encourage or discourage cooperation and cultural exchange within and between the regions. The participants do this as they learn the necessary skills to professionally deal with existing cultural misperceptions, prejudice and stereotypes, which constitute major obstacles to accepting diversity as a positive source of individual and collective development. These skills are expected to enable the teachers to transfer positive and democratic attitudes and knowledge to their students and communities. Training in conflict management, negotiation, mediation, human rights and democracy education are integral parts of the programme.

In terms of structure, the seminar programmes comprise keynote lectures on core themes in the morning, workshops in the afternoon, presentations and social activities in the evening. Excursions and study tours to relevant educational institutions are included in the programme. Furthermore, the participants do apply the media skills they learn writing articles for the educational journal and in the development of teaching modules, simulation activities to be used in their own schools. The teachers have a chance to present their ideas and perspectives to each other. They do work together, in pairs and in groups, and present the outcome of their work in plenary sessions. The participants

also get a chance to step into each other's shoes to enable them to see issues from different perspectives and through the different eyes. The participating teachers get assigned to prepare special lessons on cross-cultural issues of their choice to present to and receive feedback from their fellow teachers from other cultural groups.

### Regional workshops

The aims of these workshops are to provide the teachers with a learning forum to reunite, share information and experience and report on how they used their experience of the previous seminar(s) in their teaching and what feedback they have received from their students/pupils and social environment. The workshops do also provide an excellent setting for the teachers to improve the programme in light of their experience with using it.

### CB teachers uni-national meetings

As part of each seminar and workshop, local coordinators arrange meetings in their respective sectors for the selection and preparation of the participants for the activities. After the participants return from the seminars and workshops, reflection and evaluation meetings are held in the respective sectors by the coordinators. These uni-national meetings function as forums for the teachers to share ideas and perspectives in their own national groups on the overall development of the project. After every meeting, the local coordinators compile reports and send them to all the partners and the Project Manager to share the information.

### Reunion meetings

As an expression of solidarity and empathy with their fellow Israeli and Palestinian teachers, reunion meetings are organised in Jerusalem. All the teachers who have participated in the previous seminars and workshops are invited to the reunion meetings in the Holy City.

The programme of the reunion meetings will comprise keynote lectures by outside speakers followed by presentations by the participants themselves. Participants will then divide into workshop groups to share information, ideas, experiences and perspectives on the project. Based on their experience of the project, the participants will be coached and encouraged to express their hopes and visions for future dialogue activities in the Middle East.

### Preparation for the first encounter with the other side

Adequate preparation of the participants before meeting their counterparts is the first step toward a successful meeting. Thus after the careful and lengthy selection of the participants, several meetings are held in each sector for the participants to get introduction about the basic idea, programmes and expected challenges they are about to face and possible benefits that participants could get out of the adventure. Among the things they get prepared for are going to meet, live, cooperate and engage in dialogue with people with different backgrounds, narratives, perspectives, beliefs and ways of doing things. It is important for the participants to know and expect that different people could see the same thing entirely differently. Thus, their historical facts may likely be seen as fake inventions to justify certain political aims. They need to be strong, able to listen to opposite points of view and bring along big and sharp ears rather than big mouths. Culture shock could be expected in such situations.

The other thing that participants need to know is that they represent nobody but themselves. It is also perfectly acceptable to change one's viewpoints or positions. Therefore, no final declarations, communiqués, agreements or other accords are going to be issued and signed at the end. They should use "I" when talking, rather than "We" to emphasise the fact that they are speaking only for themselves. They come to meet their age group, professional counterparts as equal to mutually learn from one another and together in absolute equality. The focus is on issues of common interests and concerns for common benefit. The participants are encouraged to bring along information materials, photos and cultural items that symbolise their personalities and cultures. The preparation is done by the coordinators, special experts and CB manager.

### During encounter

On arrival, the participants are welcomed and treated equally with respect and accommodated in the same building. Those who do not object, share room with someone from the other cultural groups. After the introduction, the participants are divided into mixed colour groups (e.g. apple, strawberry groups etc) to take care of certain tasks such as clearing and setting tables after meals and coordinating extra curricula activities.

To break the ice, the first half day of the encounter is dedicated to group dynamics. This includes a minute of silence for the participants to reflect on why there are here, their expectations of

themselves and from the programme and other participants and what they are willing to do to achieve what they have come for. The short introduction silence is followed with soft music as a universal language for the participants to enjoy and relax.

The next step is often playing a name game for the people to learn one another's names. This can be done in various ways. One of these ways is to make the participants stand in a circle in an alphabetical order of their names using the facilitator's first name initial as a starting point, clock wise. When the alphabetical order is complete, each participants is asked to say her/his name with positive adjective before it with a body movement symbolising their personality (e.g. magic Mary, king Khaled, great Garba) and then write their first names with the adjectives in their name.

In mixed pairs, the participants are instructed to talk and interview each other about who they are, their expectations, special hobbies, skills, needs and what make them unique. They should share the time equally, listen to each other without interruption and finally agree on 2-3 ground rules for the seminar. To make this session a positive experience, the pairs are instructed to present each other as if they were presenting each other as the best person to leader the group. After the presentations, the different ground rules are summarised and put on poster for display during the whole seminar period. The other confidence building activity is called label game in which participants have positive labels (caring, cute, adorable, trustworthy) glued on their foreheads (make sure there are no mirrors in the room) and then instruct the participants to mingle like at a cocktail party and treat each person according to the label they carry. After a few minutes or so, ask each person to guess who they are.

#### Selection of the coordinators

The coordinators are selected by Crossing Borders partner institutions in the Middle East. The Israeli Jewish coordinator is selected by the Jewish Arab Centre for Peace at Givat Haviva, Israel. The Palestinian coordinator is selected by the Jerusalem Times weekly English newspaper, the Palestinian Authority. The Arab Israeli coordinator is selected by Crossing Borders, as an independent facilitator while the Jordanian coordinator is selected by the Jordanian NGO, Masar, Jordan. The criteria for the selection of coordinators is that they must have the will, interest, pedagogical and media qualifications and skills to work in a dialogue project with follow partners

across the Arab Israeli conflict divide, on equal terms. This means they must above the tense situation and function as positive role model for their students.

## The overall programme structure

The guiding method of the programme revolves around mutual dependency, respect and equal partnership among the participants. There is an ongoing consultation among project coordinators and management to ensure active participation of the beneficiaries from the planning phase, through implementation, feedback and evaluation of each activity.

Activities are participatory and target group oriented, with maximum equal ownership of the project by the participants. Sessions during the seminars are based on workshop method. Instead of one-way communication via lectures, the participants work in pairs and groups to exchange their viewpoints freely and reach conclusions.

This active participation of target group is expected to result in increased cooperation skills, shared values, understanding of issues of common concern, joint ownership and collective responsibility by the participants.

The programme consists of keynote introductory lectures in the morning, simulation games, workshop methods and role-plays with concrete exercises to win the attention and interest of the participants and maintain their motivation and engagement in the activities. Activities are aimed at encouraging dialogue and deeper mutual understanding and transformation. Crosscultural communication, individual reflection, cooperation, active listening and teamwork are some of the key guiding principles and practices of the programme. Generally, participants from conflict area would not be satisfied before jumping into the hot issues. It is important to be ready to facilitate the discussion so as everyone gets the chance to express their points of view and be heard. If participants return home without taking up the hot topics, they may feel like swimming without getting wet.

Follow-up and remaining in contact to mitigate return culture shock.

Upon return to their communities, the participants face new challenges because they belong to different realities. It is a big problem for Arab and Jewish teenagers to return home after a unique experience with the “enemy”. In SAFETI On-Line Newsletter, Volume 1, Number 1, Fall 1999, 2000, return culture shock is defined as “what you experience when you return home and have to readjust to your own country”. This is particularly for young people from value loaded conflict areas. According to the Safelt newsletter, students who are returning home should prepare themselves that:

- Family and friends may show less interest in your stories and experiences than you expect. This may make you feel lonely, misunderstood, or unappreciated.
- If you are unhappy about your return home you may try to withdraw from or delay from re-establishing good relations with family and friends.
- You will no longer stand out in your surroundings. When you were a foreigner you may have attracted more interest and developed new friendships. Once you are home your friends will not find you so unusual.
- Being at home is not challenging and exciting in the way that life is in a foreign country where you have to struggle to make a success of everything from food habits to behaviour, dress codes and language.
- There is a sense of achievement in having to stretch yourself to meet challenges in a foreign country. A sense of achievement or personal growth is not the same at home where you do not face so many challenges.
- You may miss foreign friends as well as the culture, the climate, the food and the language.
- Your hometown may not seem as glamorous, interesting or exciting as the cities or towns you visited or lived in while you were abroad. <http://www.lmu.edu/global>

On the challenge re-entry culture shock, Bruce La Brack has written extensively on this topic. In his article entitled the “The Missing Linkage: The Process of Integrating Orientation and Reentry, la Brack argues that “Reentry shock or reverse culture shock occurs, but the problem is that the return home is usually characterized by two unique elements: (1) an idealized view of "home" and (2) a taken-for-granted familiarity with the home culture which fosters the illusion that neither home nor the sojourner will have changed since she/he went away. This combination of mistaken attitudes frequently results in frustrated expectations, various degrees of alienation, and mutual misunderstanding between returnees and their friends and family.” (La Brack, 1985).

While the Israeli and Jordanian participants can expect their parents and relatives to meet them at the airport, many of the Palestinians have to use the public transports after thorough security checks and search. On their way home to the West Bank they have to pass through the nerve breaking checkpoints before they can hope to see their families. After returning from the last year summer seminar in Denmark, one Palestinian youth wrote me:

*After I came back from the seminar that was held in Denmark, I was full of hopes and dreams about peace and the possibility of approaching it. As two days passed I recognised that I was just dreaming.*

*“This seminar planted in my mind a lot of ideas by using several methods that convinced my brain. The matter of equality was one of these ideas. We lived in the same building under one roof. They tried to treat us the same. We ate, played and danced together. We felt that we are all humans that deserve to live equally. Palestinians and Israelis were Equal!!! What about the reality? When the airplane dropped us off, the Israelis' parents came to pick up their children from the airport. Of course, parents miss their children and want to see them as soon as possible; to hug and kiss them if they haven't seen them for a long time. I remembered my mother who lives near Ramallah and said in my mind, " Maybe my mother didn't miss me, that's why she didn't come to pick me up"!!! Actually I knew that the way is very difficult. I remembered the check point that is placed not very far from our home” (Jerjes Boullata, 2003).*

In an article Culture Shock: A Fish Out of Water, Elaine Addison writes that there “are five distinct phases (or stages) of culture shock. .” This first stage of culture shock is called the "honeymoon phase.", This may lead to the second stage of culture shock, known as the "rejection phase.", stage three: the "regression phase.", If you survive the third stage successfully (or miss it completely) you will move into the fourth stage of culture shock called the "recovery phase" or the "at-ease-at-last phase.", Much later, you may find yourself returning to your homeland and -guess what? - you may find yourself entering the fifth phase of culture shock. This is called "reverse culture shock" or "return culture shock" and occurs when you return home. You have been away for a long time, becoming comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle and you may find that you are no longer completely comfortable in your home country. Many things may have changed while you were away and it may take a little while to become at ease with the cues and signs and symbols of your home culture. Reverse culture shock can be very difficult. There is a risk of sickness or emotional problems in many of the phases of culture shock. Remember to be kind to yourself all the time that you are overseas, and when you get home. Give yourself time to adjust. Be your own best friend. If you do these things you will be a much stronger person. If you do these things, Elaine Addison <http://www.johnsesl.com/templates/reading/cultureshock/>

Here we need to come with the remedial stage of counselling. The young people have direct contact with their local coordinator and the CB manager to help them deal and cope with returning to the war reality. A week after returning home, the coordinators organise a meeting in the respective national groups to reflect, share experience and ideas on the seminar experience and its aftermath. As people, especially young people, tend to fear the reaction of their groups more than the “enemy” they often hesitate to talk about participating in a seminar with people from the other side. They are often blamed for having changed or gone crazy. Therefore, it is important to organise a meeting for the whole national group that has participated in meeting the other side. They can discuss, reflect on the experience and work out strategies to cope with the often negative reaction of their class mate,

age group etc. In 2001, one Israeli participant after a few days of meeting and becoming friend of a Palestinian youth said:

*"If someone were to tell me that in two weeks, my best friend would be a Palestinian, I would have thought I would be more likely to win the lottery. X is my soul mate. He has told me that the only reason we get along is because we're equal here. Through this experience, all the walls have fallen down for me. When I go home, I don't even want to know what's going to happen. I'll have to hide my new feelings, even though I now feel proud that my best friend is a Palestinian"* (Linda Horowitz, 2001)

Another effective way of following up on the Crossing Borders youth is the regular every second week meetings in their national groups and the reunion meetings that normally take place in Jerusalem for all the groups. However, the most important fact that keeps the participants engaged and active in Crossing Borders is writing in and receiving the magazine every second month. Writing, sending the articles back and forth to and from the coordinators and giving and receiving feedback on their articles, keep the participants in constant contacts with the project, their coordinators and with one another. Another core incentive to stay active in Crossing Borders is the opportunity to participate in the two follow up workshops in Turkey in November and March for the previous summer course participants who have been active in the project. Finally, perhaps the most important reason for them to join and stay in Crossing Borders is that it does contribute positively to their personal and academic development. We have many examples of participants who say that their school performance, self-confidence and language skills have improved. I know of two Jordanian brothers whose parents testified to the positive effects of participating in the programme. The elder brother got a full scholarship at MIT and the second was accepted to study hotel management in Switzerland earlier in 2004. He explained in his application that after being in Crossing Borders for four years he learnt to work and deal with people from different cultures. A Palestinian participant received a full scholarship to Indiana University, which she attributed to her active participating in CB. It is no doubt that learning to study, produce a magazine and cooperate with fellow counterparts has positive effects both on self image and one's image of the world around us. Having one's articles and photos published and developing the confidence and skills to stand up and speak about complex issues in front of a big international crowd also have an empowering effect on the personal and professional development of particularly young people. Thus, the combined effects of demystifying the other, increased awareness and skills development

are a source for both mental and emotional health. After this year's summer course, one Palestine participant wrote an email to the group saying:

*“Hey ...everyone...*

*Well...I can't start telling you the impact of Denmark on me ....its weird. My mom always told me that I give out these vibes to Israelis that I don't like them and that's why I always get in trouble with soldiers. But after coming back, she saw me dealing with soldiers more at ease and when I went to the mall the girls working there were talking to me nicely. I was shocked; it's as if now I am treating the Israelis in a normal kind of human way. I owe it all [this] to you guys coz this is gonna get me out of a lot of problems that I used to get into before....and on another level... that's the thing not a lot about u know that happened to me in Denmark is the encounter with Islam that I had. It is really helping me out. It's making me think differently about a lot of things in my life and I am really shocked from the way I started thinking or dealing with people around me...I love it. It is like Denmark was a kind of therapy to me.. And I hope that it helped you guys too. Other then that I really miss all of you, and I really hope and wish we can all meet up again” (Ashira Ramadan, 2004).*

## The need and role of the third party

In value laden and protracted conflict with deep rooted suspicion and mistrust like in the Middle East conflict, it is necessary to have a third party's mediation. It is on this basis that the International People's College chose to facilitate meetings between Arab and Israeli educators and youth on a neutral ground and under the same roof in Denmark. Such neutral third party approach has been used to facilitate successful dialogue meetings and learning to live together since the school opened its doors for that purpose in 1921. In Crossing Borders, the role of IPC as mediator is concentrated on ensuring the implementation of the activities according to the stated values of Crossing Borders: balance, equality, learning and quality publications of the magazine. With highly interested, knowledgeable and experience management and facilitation team, it has been possible to bring the participating educators and/or youth from the conflict areas to meaningful dialogue sessions for the past 10 years. Participants have come not only from the Middle East, but also, Burundi, South Africa, the Balkans and Central Europe.

In order to win and maintain trust as neutral third party, it is essential that the facilitator(s) meet minimum criteria, among which are:

- Deep interest in, knowledge of and commitment to working in the situation with these kinds of groups.
- Respect for the positions and view points of the involved parties
- Ability to facilitate that everybody has the opportunity to fully participate and voice their opinions.
- Equal treatment, deep understanding of the situation of the parties and empathy toward them
- To a certain extent, the third party needs to be inspiring and embodying the hope and aspiration of the parties.
- Having the necessary facilitation skills, personal stability and humility.
- Ongoing consultation with the participants' organisations, communities and leadership.
- Sensitivity to individual and group needs and awareness of group dynamics.
- Awareness of the fine line between intervening too much or too little.
- Honesty and transparency at all level of the encounter and dialogue process from planning through implementation to evaluation.
- Having sufficient balance between the groups with equal number of participants, gender balance, same level of education and age etc.

## Possible duplication in other contexts

Experience from the Crossing Borders demonstrates that joint production and creation can form a perfect framework for bringing different individuals and cultural groups to meet and work together as a team towards common goals. As we have seen in the previous pages, in the process of working together toward common goals, participants are likely to learn to know, appreciate, respect and finally demystify each other. Such positive experience will help both young and adult people realise that there are no strangers (or enemies), only friends that they have not yet met and learnt to know and appreciate. "It's like a marriage in traditional Middle East. You marry first and then you fall in love later, not the other way around." This means that complex conflict issues can be approached using simple methods. Instead of for example focusing directly on the conflict, it is often better to start with what the participants have in common to build a programme on. In Crossing Borders we hardly have any session on resolving the conflict in the Middle East. What we do is to focus on the process to conflict management, communication and media skills that the participants apply to writing articles for the magazine. The participants get extensive training not

through one-way communication lectures, but through learning in pairs and small groups by doing through simulations, group dynamics and role-plays to be in the shoes of each other. The magazine is both a framework to keep the focus of the participants and also a direct outcome of their joint efforts. The end product with both individual and joint articles creates joint responsibility and interest in the magazine being distributed in their schools and beyond. Thus, in the process of learning useful skills and joint production of the magazine, the participants learn to know and appreciate one another as a positive step towards peaceful and cooperative coexistence. The magazine can be accessed online ([www.crossingborder.org](http://www.crossingborder.org))

In conclusion, the concept of Crossing Borders can be applied to other situations of inter/crosscultural meetings. The basic rule is meeting in a neutral space, focusing on common interests and concerns on equal terms, towards achieving a common goal. Elements of gaining relevant knowledge and skills while participants have fun are essential components in successful encounters across cultures. The concept can easily be used for dialogue and integration between host culture and immigrant groups as well as other inter/cross/multicultural encounter programmes. For such encounters to succeed, the following criteria and principles need to be applied:

- Integration has to be at least a two-way process that meets respective needs and take into consideration the mutual fears of both or all the groups involved in the process.
- The meeting point has to be seen as neutral, safe, stimulating and attractive. Travelling and spending time on a camp and study tour will be helpful for integration.
- There has to be useful elements of learning new and immediately beneficial knowledge and skills
- The participants have to do, create/produce some useful things together for which they feel joint ownership, responsibility and pride.
- There has to be equality between the groups in terms of numbers and education levels and sufficient common interest/ground to build on.
- To have professional, personally balanced, culturally knowledgeable, sensitive, neutral and dynamic facilitators.
- Participants need to have fun and enjoy themselves while they learn together and through one another.

## INTERCULTURAL/CROSSCULTURAL ACTIVITIES BY GARBA DIALLO

### **Being in the shoes of the others**

Work time: 45 minutes

Presentation Time: 5 minutes per group

The aim of this simulation activity is to imagine ourselves in the shoes of others.

In each group, imagine that you have been forced by circumstances out of your home country to the Middle East.

After six rough month stay in temporary refugee camps, fortunately, the UN High Commission for Refugees has managed to secure a permanent residence permit for you in the following country to settle for good.

The question to each group is what will they do to integrate and effectively function as much as possible in their new society?

Think, reflect, discuss, agree and briefly present in writing and orally your integration strategies in the host culture.

The criteria of your integration will be measured in terms of core cultural values and aspects like:

- Language
- Religion and traditions
- Food and drink habits
- Gender roles and relations
- Dress codes of conduct
- Schools for yourself and children
- Career choice
- The will to learn about and respect local laws and rules of the game
- Mutual expectations

- Aspects of your culture/values you are willing to give up to integrate
- Aspects of your culture which you cannot imagine to be without

### **Designing a multicultural school**

Work time: 45 minutes

Presentation Time: 5 minutes per group

Aim: To increase our cooperation skills based on equality and task sharing.

Method

- Design a multicultural school for 12-15 years old pupils from various cultural and religious backgrounds, with all the necessary facilities
- Make a day programme from 9 am to 2 pm for the pupils to learn about global citizenship.
- Describe the method of teaching and the relationship with teachers
- Draw a boy and a girl with the correct type of outfit
- What and how should they eat for lunch
- The children are Muslims, Jewish; Christians while the remaining practise different indigenous beliefs.

### **Designing an international youth club**

Work time: 45 minutes

Presentation Time: 5 minutes per group

Aim: To increase our cooperation skills based on equality and task sharing.

Method:

- Design an international youth club indicating all the facilities you deem necessary.
- Make a programme for opening and closing hours
- The type of activities to be implemented during the weekends
- The sort of music to be played and drinks to be served
- Colours and other decorations to reflect the international nature and target group relevance of the club.
- Task division of duties to manage the club, who is responsible for what and why.

## **Preparation of an international Christmas party**

Work time: 45 minutes

Presentation Time: 5 minutes per group

Aim: To increase our cooperation skills based on equality and task sharing.

Method: Prepare an international Christmas party for a group of 50 people from Africa, Europe and the Middle East. The participants include an equal number of men and women, all in their late 20s.

In the group, discuss and agree on how to organise the party to make it a memorable and enjoyable experience for the participants.

Key elements to remember:

- the venue, where the party is going to held and why
- when should the guests come and leave
- what is expected from the guests to bring or help with
- what kind of food and drinks will be served
- how the food and drinks are going to be consumed
- what kind of music will be played
- what the dress code should be for both men and women
- plus any other necessary things which could be thought of

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