

'THE COMMUNITY OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY' AND THE ENHANCEMENT OF
INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

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Abstract:

This analysis shows how P4C can be used as a tool to enhance greater intercultural sensitivity. A group of young Maltese university seekers and teenage unaccompanied minor asylum seekers engaged in dialogic inquiry, in the process changing the way in which they see their individual subjective identities. The analysis moves away from the application of P4C in formal educational settings and also moves away from its application in childhood settings. In this manner, it aspires to advance knowledge of how P4C can be creatively applied to generate such values as understanding, empathy, dialogue, acceptance of self and others, and sharing. It also shows how people can heal certain past hurts through sharing and also help them to generate hope of a brighter future. Their formation into a community of inquiry is an outward manifestation of their inner quest for a greater understanding of their own realities and their desire to understand people of other cultures. Through providing an account based on listening to the voices of the young asylum seekers, the analysis is informed by the transience of lived experiences and the youthfulness of the asylum seekers. It is based on an inter-disciplinary blend of psychoanalytic, socio-cultural, and philosophical thinking.

Key-words: intercultural sensitivity; self-reflexivity; pluralism; dialogue; hope

Filosofía para niños y la intensificación de la sensibilidad intercultural

Resumen:

Este análisis muestra como *filosofía para niños* (fpn) puede ser usada como herramienta para cultivar una mayor sensibilidad intercultural. Un grupo de jóvenes investigadores universitarios de Malta y un grupo de menores investigadores de un asilo se comprometieron en una investigación dialógica, en un proceso de cambiar la manera en que ellos ven su identidad subjetiva individual. El análisis se distancia de la aplicación de fpn en un contexto de educación formal y también se aleja de su aplicación en espacios infantiles. De esta forma, aspira a propiciar conocimiento sobre como fpn puede ser creativamente aplicada para generar valores como el entendimiento, la empatía, el diálogo, la aceptación del yo y de los otros y el compartir. También muestra cómo las personas pueden superar ciertas heridas del pasado al compartirlas con otros y también ayuda a las personas a generar esperanza en un futuro más luminoso. La formación en ellas de una comunidad de investigación es una manifestación externa de su búsqueda interior de una mayor comprensión de sus realidades y su deseo de entender personas de otras culturas. Al ofrecer un relato basado en la escucha de las voces de los jóvenes investigadores del asilo, el análisis se informa por la transición de las experiencias de vida y la jovialidad de los investigadores del asilo. El trabajo se basa en una combinación interdisciplinar de psicoanálisis y pensamiento filosófico y sociocultural.

Palabras llave: sensibilidad intercultural; auto-reflexividad; pluralismo; diálogo; esperanza

Filosofia para crianças e a intensificação da sensibilidade intercultural

Resumo:

Essa análise mostra como a Filosofia para Crianças (FpC) pode ser usada como uma ferramenta para intensificar a sensibilidade intercultural. Um grupo de jovens investigadores universitários malteses e investigadores adolescentes órfãos moradores de um orfanato são engajados numa investigação dialógica, num processo de mudança do modo como eles vêm suas identidades subjetivas individuais. A análise sai da aplicação da FpC num ambiente educativo formal e também de sua aplicação no âmbito da infância. Desta maneira, o trabalho procura avançar no conhecimento sobre como a FpC pode ser aplicada criativamente para garantir tais valores como compreensão, empatia, diálogo, aceitação de si e dos outros, e compartilhamento. Ele também mostra como as pessoas podem curar algumas feridas do passado através do compartilhamento, e também as ajuda a criar a esperança de um futuro mais luminoso. A participação deles numa comunidade de investigação é uma manifestação externalizada de suas questões pessoais para uma melhor compreensão de suas próprias realidades e seus desejos de entender as pessoas de outras culturas. Através da importância dada à escuta da voz desses investigadores órfãos, a análise é conformada pela transição de experiências de vida e a juventude dos investigadores órfãos. O trabalho é estruturado numa combinação interdisciplinar de psicanálise e pensamento socio-cultural e filosófico.

Palavras-chave: sensibilidade intercultural; auto-reflexão; pluralismo; diálogo; esperança

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Introduction.

This paper explores the inter-reactive influence that a group of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and a group of young Maltese people have on one another while carrying out a series of planned activities. These activities were followed by philosophical discussions that are based on inputs derived from an adapted pedagogic approach based on a Philosophy for Children (P4C) methodology. Rather than using fictional stories in the manner that Matthew Lipman had done when writing *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, *Lisa* and other books to promote philosophical inquiry, participants were enjoined to recount personal narratives. These were then employed as material to stimulate discussion, reflection and philosophical inquiry. Such narrated 'stories' proved to be of greater interest to them as they related directly to their own experiences and were the products of their own 'authorship.' Such personal narratives may easily serve as powerful starting points for exploratory philosophical talk and dialogues not only with young people but also with children and adults. This project highlights issues for further consideration in P4C in respect of choosing a 'starting point' of an enquiry. So as to initiate such discussion, more neutral ice-breakers were given such as starting a discussion about a flag, about food, and about whether the young people were feeling comfortable that day. Although fictional material (either text or visual) could have been introduced, it was believed that this be best avoided. This was because it was feared that since these could have too broad a focus and trigger negative recollections thereby serving to instigate people to close off rather than to open up to discussion about their thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

The asylum seekers are unaccompanied minor adolescent boys, aged between 14 and 16, who have left their homelands in different parts of Africa and come to Malta by sea. The boys aspire to leave Malta in order to build their futures elsewhere in Europe. Asylum seekers have been arriving in Malta in relatively large numbers since 2002 (Spiteri, 2008). Malta is located to the south of Sicily and to the north of Libya. It is a small country with a size of just over 300 km². Although it is small, it is densely populated. It has a population of almost half a million people. The main language spoken is Maltese, but a considerable number of people, particularly the more educated, also speak English. The Maltese constitution recognizes both Maltese and English as the country's official languages. Malta became a member of the European Union in 2004. It then became party to the Schengen Agreement, in 2007. In 2008, it became a member of the Eurozone.

The asylum seekers are housed at *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa*. This residence is located in a central part of Malta. It was purposely set up in 2004 so as to offer accommodation and shelter to young asylum seekers by the Maltese government. While this residence can house up to twenty-five residents, at the time when this research was taking place, there were twenty residents present. Fifteen of the residents came from Somalia and from other countries in the Horn of Africa including Ethiopia and Eritrea. Three participants came from countries in East Africa such as Mali and the Ivory Coast. Two were Nigerians. Their level of speaking and understanding of English varied. The Nigerians were fluent in English. The Somali people however had difficulty in speaking and communicating in English. It remains to be pointed out, however, that unless speaking to people who are from their own country of origin (wherein they would speak in their own native language), more often than not, the residents at *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa* communicated in English. This engaged them in becoming more conversant in the language as time passed. The reason why English was used so extensively was a practical one, namely that since none of them could speak any

other African language other than that which was spoken in their home-land, speaking in their native tongue only would translate itself into their being unable to speak to anyone else in the home other than those who hailed from their own country of origin.

Methodology.

Four young Maltese people are referred to in this study. They are university students and are pursuing undergraduate studies in social-work, psychology and education. They are all young women who are in their early twenties. They visited *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa* once a week to implement group-based 'activities' for the asylum seekers.

They got the idea of carrying out these 'activities' when participating in an EU funded seminar that grouped together young people who were active in the social field from different European countries. The young people who participated in this seminar were all linked to NGOs in their respective home-countries. The Maltese young people represented Caritas (Malta), which is a generic church-run social agency with which I was employed. Since Caritas (Malta) had links with *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa*, and the young people from Malta wanted to work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, the Maltese participants decided to develop and implement a project that was constituted of 'activities' that would generate greater empathy and intercultural understanding and sensitivity toward and amongst unaccompanied asylum seekers in Malta.

As a starting point of the project's implementation, I enjoined the Maltese young people who volunteered to take part in this project at *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa*, (from now on referred to as 'the volunteers') to participate in a training course on P4C that I conducted for them. This course was modeled on a similar course that I had attended in Graz, Austria, in 2008 on Developing Intercultural Dialogue through Philosophical Inquiry. This course was run by the Austrian Centre of Philosophy with Children.

The course in Malta took place once a week for two months, each session lasting for three hours each. These sessions were then stopped for two weeks, so that the volunteers could use the allotted time to start working with the Africans directly and apply what they had learnt in practise at *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa*. In the following week, these sessions were followed by an additional evaluation session that lasted for around one and a half hours. Since the researcher served as a participant in the sessions that were to be conducted with the asylum seekers he gave on-going supervision and feedback. Furthermore, on a once-monthly basis, he met with the young Maltese people on their own, so as to not only engage in discussion about the manner in which they perceived the group's instrumental goals as being met, but more importantly to engage them in self-reflexive questions about how what was being stated was influencing them. In this manner, they were also assigned a personal space in which they could reflect on their own personal beliefs, positive or negative, and also about social pressures that were culturally defined and about which they may have been previously unaware (since they did not have access to the knowledge about other cultures they now had).

There was a total of twenty-five sessions that were conducted directly with the asylum seekers throughout the year. The sessions took place during a six-month period by the end of which all but one of the asylum seekers had left Malta. They were all awarded a visa to depart from Malta for some time, and had all 'failed' to return. Effectively, this implied that from a legal perspective they had absconded from Malta but in reality they had followed through their original plans.

Even though the volunteers were not professional teachers, and thereby possibly disadvantaged when it came to fully understanding the particular pedagogic strengths of a P4C methodology, the training served to expose them to exploring philosophical concepts and to unpacking stories and personal narrations so as to build a sense of community and dialogue with (and amongst)

the Africans. During their training, the volunteers were encouraged to work at developing critical and creative thinking skills, including listening to view-points that were different from their own; to reflect on the validity of reasons that augmented the point they were trying to carry across to others, including how to generate alternatives and to be more self-reflexive; and to criticize basic philosophical tenets and frameworks. All of these are seen as essential components of effective and meaningful P4C training (Weber and Gardner, 2009).

Stating this, it is usual within a P4C context to have one teacher or lecturer and a class of students, each with clearly defined roles and expectations. The fact that there were four people who took over the role of the one teacher, it was still possible for them to create a community of inquiry by attending to the above components served to blur the position/role of 'facilitator' and 'participant'. This was because the collaborative facilitation and the mutual experiences of dialogue served to create a 'between participants' analysis of self-identity rather than 'within participants' analysis (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2006). This was by encouraging them not to focus on the self as a personal self that was based on the view of the self as an individual or separate entity. Rather, the presence of so many young people together, each without formal teacher training (which in this case carried the advantage of no-body coming into fixed roles such as I am the 'teacher, lecturer, facilitator' etc. and you are 'the student') served the purpose of engaging the young people present on reflecting on their social self, where the self-identity relationship is influenced by such mediating factors as interpersonal relationships, contexts, influences, and so on. In this manner, the community of inquiry came to be focused not only on what caused the participants to be who they are but also to assess whether who they are is the product of how they are influenced by other and how others influence them. This could serve to also explain how the community of inquiry which is an integral part of P4C can be (and has been) described as a "space where (people) ... encounter the

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transcendent in the continual coming-to-presence of the other" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 340). Rather than referring to the physical presence of students and teachers together, the community of inquiry is concentrated more on what it does. Rather than promoting exclusive teacher centered learning, based on a chalk and talk method with the teacher in an authoritative, know-it-all position, in response to this, it presents a "a dual shift of focus: not only the shift from the teacher to the students, but another one (and in this case particularly so)... a shift from the individual to the community" (Simenc, 2008 p. 324).

Whereas Simenc notes that "in the community of inquiry the teacher can assume different positions, play various roles and perform a number of functions" (ibid., p. 235), in the context of this study, the adoption of so many different roles is made even more complex since the different responsibilities of the teacher are shared between the volunteers. This translates into their taking nothing for granted so as to place themselves in a position whereby they would be enabled to engage all present in processes of thinking, reflection and questioning. Stating this, the community of inquiry involves members' creating and co-creating a peer-mediated 'space' where each individual's "sensitivity to the importance of cultural differences and to the points of view of people in other cultures" (Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992, p. 414) can be heightened as a result of the shared inquiry that comes about.

The 'coming-to-presence of the other' from other cultures arises since individuals can experience their own selfhood as separate as distinct from that of others, and yet also experience the self as other, a process that Kennedy (1999, p. 340) refers to as "self-othering." Just as when an old man goes into a supermarket with his three year old grandson and does not realize what his grandchild is imagining the supermarket to be like until he drops something on the floor and looks upwards at the supermarket shelves rather than looking at them downwards or at eye-level, (as he would, naturally, as a relatively taller 'adult'), similarly, in a community of inquiry, it is only when members are able and

willing to reconstruct subjectivities differently that, consequently, changed perceptions and meanings that reflect the world as seen, experienced and lived by others, can result.

The training given to the volunteers had the goal of developing their dispositions that Hoffman (2000, p.63) associates with “mature empathizers.” These are built up from their ability to consider alternative positions and subjective identities alongside their own. These dispositions were then to be modeled when forming themselves into a community of inquiry with the asylum seekers since it was indispensable that all present would be open to both ‘expressing’ and ‘taking in’ new ideas, whilst remaining on track in their overlying discussion. An interesting aspect of this training was that, in consonance with Lipman’s (1991) ideas, they suggested that they mainly had to model an inquiry that is based on their asking questions in such a way that they would dig deeper into their own assumptions and generate answers that are more tentative than they are final. Naturally, it was indispensable that they also took into consideration, as Hoffman (ibid.) suggests, the plurality and multiplicity of different possible arising perspectives, as they went along, ensuring that the voice of each and every person present was given its importance, or to derive a word from systemic family therapy literature, was given ‘warrant.’

Communicators need to be responsive to different ideas and inputs and thereby promote “critical engagement, self-reflection and sensitivity towards any aspect of interaction and communication between “self” and “others”” (Papademetre, 2003, p. 1). This is reinforced by the idea of an educated person as “open, curious, self-critical and willing to admit ignorance and indecision” (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980, p. 95) in P4C literature. The openness of such communication enables it to be characterized, both on an intra-personal and inter-personal level by such “metacriteria” as reliability, relevance, strength, coherence, and consistency (Lipman 1991, p. 119). This is in direct dissonance

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with the stereotypical reasoning that people adopt in order for sentiments of racial prejudice to become nascent. Hence, this shows the importance of exposing further the employment of P4C reasoning in different educational contexts.

The programme of activities that the volunteers and asylum seekers undertook at *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa* was split into two parts as follows:

- In the first part, a 'task' was set. This task was usually carried out in small groups of usually not more than four people each. It was based on such activities as painting, drawing, cooking, drama, musical expression or appreciation, and dance.
- In the second part, there were group discussions about topics that the volunteers and Africans saw as mutually important for them to explore further. This was where the participants were invited to participate in a thoughtful discussion based on the contribution of all present, thereby effectively forming a community of inquiry.

The interaction that was generated when the young people carried out 'the task' served as a precursor to the discussion in the large group. This is because it triggered conversation almost automatically. Also it gave the young people a '*raison d'être*' to start talking by simply engaging them in speaking about what they had learnt from the task set. Moreover, these activities served to generate a positive group atmosphere as well as serve as a preliminary medium of cross-cultural communication. Naturally, considerable sharing took place in the second part when, as is common practice in P4C classrooms and settings, the group-discussions involved a circular seating arrangement with all present facing one another for the discussion, irrespective of the seating arrangement that they may have adopted for the preceding 'task'. It is on the second part, i.e. on the group-discussions that this paper is mostly focused. There was no explicit goal that was set for these discussions. Stating this, overall, they could all be said to have evolved around the promoting of intercultural understanding.

The author of this paper attended the sessions by acting as a participant. He thereby adopted what has come to be called an emic approach to the study at hand, since he was both an observer and a participant and was directly involved

in what took place. Stating this, transcription of data proved problematic since it was feared that using a tape-recorder or other recording device would put the participants off, most especially since they would probably have preferred to remain anonymous. For this reason, the researcher wrote down the data as unobtrusively as possible while the Maltese and African young people interacted. So as not to prejudice the accuracy of the transcripts, the researcher often used a self-developed short-hand. He inputted the data on his personal computer at home as soon as possible after the session so as to fully comprehend and recollect what was written. For ethical reasons, no names of the participants are cited. The Maltese volunteers have been given the *nom-de-plumes* of Angela, Rebecca, Christine and Martha. The Africans have also been assigned *nom-de-plumes*, as illustrated by the male names presented below. These are Mohammed, Desfa, Azi, Taban, Ghedi, Korfa, Dalmar, Ekon, Sayed, and Adunbi.

Results:

Generating philosophical discussion using dialogue about events in people's lives.

During one of the sessions, the preliminary task that was carried out consisted of the asylum seekers and the volunteers drawing flags of their respective countries and then discussing what the flags meant to them. This served to engage the participants in reflecting on their origins. They asked each other questions and looked for reasons and opinions behind the assertions that were being made. They also built on each other's ideas so as to then relate these to the situation in their own country. The impact that such philosophically inclined questioning had on the participants was summed up by Christine as follows:

[Christine]: "Mohammed said that he would rather be in Malta than in Somalia because of the war. Yet, he says that he is proud to be from Somalia. On the other hand, he questions if he will not be in Malta for

ever. Ideally, he would like to settle down in a country that he can call home. What does it mean to be displaced, not to have a home-land, to be going somewhere, and not knowing when one will leave or where one is going to? Coming to think of it, though, it is now that I am thinking of these things. Before meeting the asylum seekers, I was Maltese, simply Maltese. That was it. What exactly does being Maltese mean? Now that I have come to know the people from Somalia, for instance, does it mean quite the same thing that it did before? I have more to compare with now than I had previously, well, ... don't I?"

This notion of self-reflexivity emerges from critical and reflective thinking. What Christine is saying reflects her disposition to engage in greater reflexivity based on "entering other people's lives" (Larson, 1997, p. 469). This can give a person a richer repertoire of selves, in the sense that the person's identity is challenged and expanded and the person's questioning of 'what does it mean to me' or 'what does it mean to be Maltese' is one way of offering evidence of this. Christine is allowing herself to be in a more informed position in which to understand others. She has gone from the unknown (being from Somalia) to the known (being Maltese) and then gone on from there to a point where the unknown and the known become more *en par* with one another (What does being from Somalia mean? What does being from Malta mean?). Christine is now in a position to empathize with the Africans as rather than seeing them as dissimilar she is focusing on existential questions (underlying the meaning of being from Malta or Somalia) that she could ask and that accentuate her similarity with the Africans. Previous to getting to know the people from Somalia, she was Maltese, simply 'Maltese'. This change in perspective evidences a metamorphosis of her thinking. This metamorphosis is on two levels.

On one level, it stems from what I will call 'a better informed meta-position.' This is constituted of Christine having a relatively more accurate self-awareness than she had previous to her interactions with the others. This stems from her having been confronted, as a result of these interactions, with differences in the values, attitudes, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, dispositions,

shared understandings, and actions and reactions of people of other cultures. Granted that any empathic pedagogy must provide participants with a space in which feelings can be brought to conscious awareness, and then expressed and shared authentically (Spiteri, 2009), this self-awareness can be experienced most clearly in the context of interpersonal encounters and thereby only when a person is actively engaged in interaction with others.

On another level, this metamorphosis has come about since Christine is now empowered to consider her own perception of two different socioscapes, one of the Africans and one of the Maltese, in the light of the data she now has. This is rather than focusing on Malta exclusively. The socioscape referred to consists of “networks of social relations of very different intensity, spanning widely different territorial extents (Albrow, 1997, p.51).” Being from Somalia and being from Malta is unquestionably different. The two countries are readily distinguishable not only geographically, but also in virtue of the different racial characteristics of their general populations. However, rather than actually listing how these two countries are different, Christine is exploring how her perception of her own socioscape has been ‘altered’ now that she has discovered other people’s socioscapes that are different from her own. Apparently, she is having an ongoing conversation with her whole self about what she is experiencing as she is experiencing it. This particular type of intrapersonal communication, wherein things are questioned in a person’s mind as they arise, is seen as a crucial skill for people engaged in communicating across cultures since it is associated with greater self-awareness that in turn allows for greater communicative flexibility than if such introspection had never taken place (Nagata, 2004, Bennett and Bennett, 2004).

In another session, the participants were asked to draw a map of the world as they imagined it to be. This led to an interesting teamwork dynamic since the young people discussed the different countries they had traveled through in Africa. They drew their map in such a way that Desfa commented

that they were drawing the European countries as much bigger than the African ones, taking this to imply that this symbolized hope that they associated with Europe. This caused Mohammed to express his fear about not being able to make it to Europe or about finishing up being sent back to Malta or, worse still, to his homeland. When seated for the discussion, Martha, another of the volunteers, questioned what it means to be an asylum seeker traveling from one country to another.

[Martha]: "I find myself asking what it is like to be a migrant traveling through different lands. We all heard Mohammed say '*I know that I cannot have a good job, a good level of schooling, I cannot have anything. I know that if I go anywhere else in Europe, I will be sent back here. Over here fresh boat-loads of other immigrants from all over Africa will come in. Very soon, the situation in this country will become impossible to manage. What will the authorities do? Just send me back?*' I do not know what it is like to be in such a situation. I am now in a state of not-knowing. However, if I had to travel like this, I would just give up. Perhaps, I am saying this because I would have been so afraid crossing from country to country. Would I have made it to Malta? As time passed, and I traveled farther from my homeland, I would have become even more afraid. Perhaps, I would have become disillusioned. Perhaps I would have succumbed to feelings of being futureless. I have so many questions. What? Is this thing right? Why should people risk their lives to build a future? Is building a future what practically everyone my age wants to do? My confusion is something I want to discuss with the group. I wonder what the Africans think. I wonder what the other volunteers think. I wonder what everyone thinks. I am so confused."

What Martha is referring to as her 'confusion' reflects her own highly varied self-talk. Like Christine, Martha has adopted different 'inner voices' induced by what Mohammed is saying. However, her questioning approach stems from these voices building on one another so as to evoke a build-up of emotions that increase in their intensity as the dialogue progresses. Therefore, 'maybe I will give up' has led to 'I would be so afraid.' 'I would be so afraid' leads to the possibility of becoming 'disillusioned'. Being disillusioned then leads her to mention the possibility of succumbing to feelings of being 'futureless.'

From a philosophical perspective, the question 'what exactly are you afraid of?' can bring about definitions of what suffering means, what justice means, even what God means. Martha's desire to know what the others were thinking was on this level. It was not intended to generate immediate responses by reconciling the different voices she was presenting. Rather, it was intended to generate an exploration of concepts such as fairness, rules, rights, obligations, and empathy. This could be interpreted as allowing her access to greater emotional self-regulation. This is illustrated by her question, 'what? Is this thing right?' It seems that one way in which what she was saying could be understood was that she wanted to learn more about different aspects of life that would fall under the overall theme of 'coping'.

Later in the session, one of the Nigerians spoke about his expanded views stemming from integrating for the first time with people from different parts of Africa after leaving Nigeria, particularly in Libya, and then in Malta. He said that,

[Azi]: "I am realizing that I never had contact with foreigners before I started on my way to Europe. Yet today, I form part of this community of people from different parts of Africa. Now that I am Malta, I am also with the Maltese. I used to believe there was one world, and that world was called Nigeria. Today, I realize that there are many worlds since people have different experiences, and even if those experiences are the same, the way they see those experiences, their perspective of those experiences, is different. I would not be here, carrying out this discussion, had all the people in this room not been here. I would thereby say that this discussion is allowing me to question how people from other parts of the world perceive things. Yet, even so, ultimately, it depends on each and every person in this group to be open to receive those 'things' if they are to consider and to perceive them. Also they have to have the will to share their own 'things' with others in order to enable discussions like this to take place. I suppose it takes time to relate to people. In earlier sessions, I held back from sharing certain things and the discussion was not so much centered on me alongside the others but was centered mainly on the others. Do not get me wrong, I held back not because I was disinterested. I was interested. Only I wanted to hear what the other said so that I could

take in all I could from this group. Today, now that I am sharing as well, I am finding it easier to understand what is being said, because it is about me and the others, not just about 'them'. I would say that, right now, I am part of a diverse community."

Azi is presenting two different themes. Firstly, he is saying that his intercultural sensitivity increased due to his exposure to people from different parts of Africa. Secondly he is saying that this was complemented by his access to different ideas within the context of the ideas being shared by the other participants. Azi is showing that what gives the nature of the discussion its particular form is that "the world is so constructed that the individual cannot know reality adequately; therefore inquiry must be a communal venture" (Kennedy, 1994, p.3). Moreover, he is also showing that a group cannot simply be viewed from the outside by an observer. Rather, the observer, upon observing a system, would need to enter the system being observed if a thorough understanding of its underlying dynamics is to be obtained (Keeney, 1983). This forming part of a system in order to understand the particular way in which a system operates can also be said to be inherent to P4C in a classroom setting since facilitators and teachers do not see themselves as detached from the classroom or as people who are separate from the class. This is not to say that the facilitator's or teacher's role is non-existent or minimal but it implies that sometimes they may be called upon to take a low profile by allowing students to take appropriate initiatives and building on what they formulate. Stating this, due to their professional inclinations and responsibilities, they must be ready to intervene as necessary to empower their students to question their conclusions and suggest ways of arriving at answers and stimulating them to ask further questions that are more comprehensive than what they are suggesting (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980)).

In a separate session, the participants explored how their involvement in the discussion could assist them to use their knowledge to help people from their own countries when they eventually settled in a European country. This was evidenced in the following dialogue.

[Taban]: "We are discussing what hope means. Why instead do we not focus on how we can give hope to others?"

[Ghedi]: "Well if we give hope to others and we know that we are giving hope to others, that is one way, a jolly good way, of knowing what hope is."

[Taban]: "OK, let's take an example. If you are in Europe and you find a person who does not know how to say this or that, and you know how to say it, you will remember when you were in the same position once. You

would not let the person be an outsider because of your experiences, won't you?"

[Korfa]: "What is an outsider?"

[Rebecca]: "Isn't it someone who does not belong?"

[Dalmar]: "Since we have been through the experience of being outsiders in the sense that we have all been in countries where we felt we did not belong, can't we say that we know what being an outsider is?"

[Ghedi]: "I think that being an outsider simply means that we can use our experience of being an outsider to understand other people more. Since we have that ability to understand, we can give them hope."

[Ekon]: "So would we all say that hope is understanding and effort?"

[Angela]: "Doesn't that sound too simplistic?"

[Taban]: "Rather, hope is about doing the 'giving' of hope. That can only be done if there is understanding. It is also about the 'wanting' to give that hope, and that can only be done if there is the will to do so. Is not that what we could all say that hope is? We can only really know what hope is when we give hope to others."

It is evident that the participants maintained a clear discussion on the concept of hope and formulated relevant questions that revealed their own contextual understanding of the term 'hope.' Gregory (2007) notes that such questions could be based on covering aspects of an issue that the people involved consider relevant and important, and exploring whether questions highlight different dimensions of a particular issue or whether they require or assume answers to others. The different dimensions and definitions of what hope is served to bring about a widened perspective of different ways of perceiving an outsider. In the above dialogue, this had shifted from 'a person being in a disadvantaged position as he is excluded' to one 'who can understand a person more due to his experience of suffering'. Through the use of language so as to

perceive reality differently the participants framed the term outsider "according to the effects they wish(ed) to bring about" (Burr, 1995, p. 90).

Further to this, way back in the 1980s, Yalom (1985) noted that learning or change is most likely to occur when the individual is in a state of dissonance but yet acts to reduce that dissonance through communication and understanding. Dissonance creates a state of psychological discomfort and propels the individual to attempt to achieve a more consonant state (p. 271). The community of inquiry is often (but not necessarily) characterized by attempts at reconciling dissonance through achieving consonance. This can be correlated by what is stated by Gregory (2006), namely that philosophical inquiry has a trajectory in the form of an arc, starting with defining the problem to be resolved, and then engaging in philosophical questioning, prior to testing the hypothesis proposed, and then usually ending in some form of resolution. Naturally, there is nothing to preclude the definition that was arrived at from being reconstructed by all the individuals concerned in future but, for that moment at least, it allowed them access to a suggestive script based on philosophical insights that could be acted upon.

For instance, in the dialogue cited above, towards the end, the participants proposed a hypothesis of what hope is, namely saying that it is understanding and effort. This was refuted. The participants themselves, nonetheless, invited themselves to test the hypothesis of what hope is in the real world by giving it to others when the appropriate opportunity arose. Even though this implementation of warranted hypothesis was clearly based on issues derived from ethical and philosophical thinking, further development of the concept some time in future remained a concrete possibility.

Certainly, such dialogues do not always end on positive suggestive notes as did the one above. Stating this, from a P4C perspective they do not necessarily have to. What is important is that judgments made or conclusions reached need to necessarily involve a process that is well-reasoned, well-informed and

personally meaningful (Gregory 2006). Sayed spoke about his future and how race served as a barrier to intercultural communication due to prejudices in a Maltese context.

[Sayed]: “The future is always unknown. However, we all have plans. I have an uncle in Germany. He is an engineer. He is black and he suffered like I suffer in Malta because I am black. Yet, I will join him. I will study. And I will gain qualifications. That is what I want to do. My uncle said that he will help me. I want to be an engineer like him. I have come this far. I will go on. I will succeed. But, hey, hey, in any case, what I would like to ask now is does anyone of us *actually* have a certain future?”

Such questions about the future, despite whatever restraints young people may come across, tend to be characteristic of people in their teens and twenties who are forging their life-course and who have their future unfolding in front of them. The issue of race, or more particularly, racism, is seen in terms of its impact on these young people’s lives. Sayed’s questions triggered the following dialogue amongst the Africans.

[Muhammed]: “Why should we worry about the distant future when we do not know where we will be?”

[Ekon]: “None of us can predict the future, can we?”

[Mohammed]: “Yet, some people know that they are studying, they will find work, have a house, a car, a family. Others do not, there are different possible futures implied in this group. However, each of us has the ability to make friends, to speak our own language, to find a job, to make something of ourselves in life beyond simply surviving. Now, we are here. We all want to move on. And move on, we all will. Only we need others to do so, that is not something we can forget either”

[Ekon]: “Yes, but it is the present that is important, since that is what we have control over. Also, we cannot control other people. We can only control ourselves.”

[Taban]: “Are we not going round in circles, isn’t it true that nobody on this whole planet knows what the future will bring? We all want to be in control of ourselves and our lives. But, surely it is only by remembering that we are uncertain of the future that we can be sensitive to each other’s cultures since by focusing on the future, we can all remember and imagine where other people are coming from.”

[Adunbi]: "Are we all worried that something will stop us from getting what we want out of life in future?"

Underlying this dialogue is the fear of the future and of the unknown. There appears to be an inherent assumption that by reaching out to others so as to listen and appraise their opinions, the Africans would see what other people think. They would thereby enlist considerations derived from a wider social context and socio-cultural environment than had they to take those decisions on their own.

This dialogue gave them access to working together to generate and then answer their own questions about the issues that impinged on their lives. The intended outcome of this dialogue was not that of reaching a consensus or resolution, rather the emphasis was on each seeking affirmation from others so as explore together the uncertainties they faced. Stating this, the accent on the different possible futures evidences the participants' desire to engage in acceptable ways, or more specifically in ways that are "appropriate to the context in which the interaction occurs" (Spitzberg, 1988, p. 68). This is evidenced through their being conscious that they have to exhibit desirable behaviors if they are to empower themselves to achieve and obtain their desired outcomes.

Analysis:

As opposed to acculturation that has been used to describe a one-sided adoption by the dominant culture and a shift in the identity of people stemming from other cultures (Berry, 1997), by noting that people may be exposed to different futures, the young people involved in this dialogue are not presenting an egocentric and egoistic understanding of reality. Rather, there is a will to embrace interactions between people having different cultural systems without anyone losing their own perspective on a given reality or without remaining true to their own beliefs and values. Through emphasizing the enabling rather than

the constraining aspects of each others' agency and purpose, the participants are engaged in discussing ideas that are well placed in a community of inquiry since they are "central to their lives, common to human experience, and contestable (and evolving) in status" (Splitter and Sharp, 1995, p. 130). This implies that they are not attempting to produce dogmatic and autocratic rules to live by. Rather, they are aiming for the potential enrichment that stems from their efforts to come to know one another which is a necessary prerequisite for effective intercultural communication (Spitzberg, 2000).

The content of the dialogues as well as the manner in which they were conducted offer testimony to P4C serving as a medium through which intercultural sensitivity toward and among the asylum seekers can be increased. This is not only amongst the asylum seekers but also amongst the facilitators who were now more likely to develop different beliefs, practises, and knowledge before they had been exposed to this group. This is particularly shown since nobody present was looking for right or wrong answers when engaging in discussion and dialogue. Rather, they engaged in an active and inter-collaborative inquiry so as to elicit understanding. This was evidenced since everyone who participated in the activities and groups at *Dar ir-Rebbiegħa* felt free to present their own view-points to the other attendees, different view-points were raised, referred to, and questioned.

In turn, this further encouraged them to reflect upon many different perspectives to a given reality. This was done as a result of their "being actively involved in exploration" (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980, p.83) of different alternative ways of looking at given realities. Such exploration offered them access to a wider repertoire of alternative possibilities with less likelihood of their making generalizations about people or events and thereby creating misunderstandings stemming from misjudgments and misconceptions (Bennett, 1993). It leads to empathy wherein they could shift their frames of reference to the others and pluralism, wherein they could compare between two or more

'the community of philosophical inquiry' and the enhancement of intercultural sensitivity

cultural frames of reference. Bennett (ibid.) notes that empathy and pluralism are a prerequisite to one's achieving a state of integration. With integration, people's sense of identity is constantly evolving since they see themselves as either outside of all cultural frames of reference, and thereby open to the development of new ideas, or constantly able to contextually analyze and evaluate behaviors which they note in other cultures, and thereby have identity and role flexibility.

Throughout the study, the participants avoided presenting ethnocentric arguments. This is evidenced by their acceptance to participate in dialogue that was based on their examination and evaluation of the effects of their thoughts, feelings, choices and actions on others, independently of their country of origin or cultural background. No participant was discounted for what he said and all opinions were respected equally. They were also respectful of all present. It stands out in all discussions, that the young people were careful not to interact in such a way that someone would feel 'excluded'. Naturally, to get to this point of having nobody feel excluded, all present then needed to assimilate any responses or feedback they received with their own repertoire of behaviors and world-views. This was so as to be competent intercultural communicators by making that knowledge about how to interact effectively their own (Gudykunst, 1992, Spitzberg, 2000). To reach this stage it was important that they all felt safe enough to create a space where they could ask and find their own answers to their own questions and promote further dialogue as a result.

Conclusion:

The narratives of the Africans show that hopes needed to be sometimes renewed if they were to approach their futures in a proactive manner. Stating this, through living an educational experience with other young people from different parts of Africa and from Malta, all the participants showed that through understanding, warmth and empathy, their differences could be a strength and a

resource that they could use to further extend deeper understanding to others. This nonetheless presumes that competent communicators are able to engage in a meaningful exchange of information that is based on choosing and enacting effective and workable communication strategies and then assessing the results of their interaction (Stier, 2003, Chen and Starosta, 2003). This study shows that this can come about using such means as discussion, exercises, and other related methods of exploration and discovery. The approach adopted in this paper offers a means through which participants have been urged to engage in dialogue. This has resulted in their engaging in meaningful intercultural sensitivity.

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