



Theses of the LIFE concept

1. The “foreigner in our midst” has become a normal everyday phenomenon of practically all modern societies. Intercultural learning is the natural response to this “normality of the other” (where differences become a stimulus to learning).
2. Intercultural learning depends essentially on the realisation that foreignness is relative. “Foreign” is not an intrinsic attribute of individual people or groups of people, but an abstract adjective that each person applies according to their own perspective.
3. Ergo, we must cease to base our understanding of other cultures on personal points of view, and even more so avoid labelling them this way. These people are capable of expressing their own desires, have a need to be heard, and are no longer willing to let others speak in their place. Intercultural learning demands that we accord the right of self-expression to those whom we perceive to be different, and that we listen attentively, without prejudice, to what they have to say.
4. This leads on to the basic guiding principle of intercultural learning: an intercultural dialogue that opens our minds to other opinions and world views.
5. Intercultural learning does not set out to provide us with a complete understanding of other cultures. There is no need to fully comprehend what makes us different in order to cultivate respect and mutual friendship. Rather, intercultural learning means developing an attitude marked by curiosity, respect and lifelong learning – beyond the limits imposed by one’s own ability to understand.
6. Harmony is not the ultimate aim of intercultural learning. Intercultural dialogue is a difficult, conflict-ridden process that needs to be recognised and accepted as such and in which the focus lies more on what divides us than on what we have in common. The inherent danger of integration policies is that they tend to ignore the latent productive energy of our “potential differences” by overemphasising assimilation and thus risking the loss of cultural identity.
7. The unbiased acceptance of other cultures in full and conscious recognition of our natural differences helps to define the outlines of our own identity. Reassessing our own values and discovering elements that estrange us from our own self-image go hand in hand with the practice of intercultural learning. It’s as if we were observing ourselves and our ingrained habits for the very first time. This is the point of departure: relearning what we thought we already knew, and learning to see life through different eyes.
8. In this way, self-interest becomes inextricably linked with a curiosity addressed towards other people. Intercultural learning makes us realise that our own existence is only possible in relation to the lives of others.
9. Intercultural learning is an essential ingredient in our everyday dealings with the unfamiliar aspects of modern society, and at the same time represents a major challenge and a difficult, laborious, lifelong process of adaptation. This makes it all the more important to start the process as early as possible, helping children at a very young age to learn from our common differences.
10. The specific elements that distinguish the LIFE concept include its focus on the normality of the other, the ability to listen attentively and without prejudice, the willingness to learn from others in a practical way, the realisation that human understanding has its limits, the importance of preserving the differences among individuals and between cultures, the constructive power of our differences and, finally, an educational approach that by its own definition embraces the differences between individual students as a stimulus to learning by all other members of the learning community.

