



World Organization of the Scout Movement
Organisation Mondiale du Mouvement Scout



Learning to live together

Peace through intercultural understanding

THEME: Opening up to the intercultural dimension: How to promote peace through the understanding and respect of other cultures.

DURATION: 2 hours (up to 2 1/2 hours)

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: up to 40

STAFF REQUIRED: 1 leader and 4 facilitators, one for each one of the small groups.

BACKGROUND

In *humankind*, culture is linked to identity. Anyone who denies or scorns my culture is in some way attacking my deepest being. Culture has been defined as a "set of meanings". In other words, it gives meaning to the life of a people and to each of its members.

Through culture, an individual therefore acquires a *cultural identity*. He gets used to looking at the world in a certain way and to judging events from his view, his perspective, his approach. This is what is called, in a general sense, *ethnocentrism*. Of course, *ethnocentrism* is essential in life: it provides us with a reservoir of values, reference points, ways to act and judge.

However, prejudices and misconceptions about other people and other communities and their way of life are sometimes the main obstacle to communication and understanding.

Many scientific experiments in different countries have proved time and again that prejudices can even cause a complete falsification of reality, as the following example shows:





“Otto Klineberg, the American psycho-sociologist, one day showed a group of white children and adults a drawing of two men, a Negro and a white. The figures were shown in different postures. Among other differences, the white man was brandishing a razor. When Klineberg later asked them to describe the drawing, several of the adults said that the Negro was holding the razor. None of the children made this mistake. The preconceived mental image of a supposedly violent and troublesome Negro had substituted itself in the adults’ mind for the real, drawn image. This preconception or stereotype is not natural but created. The children tested by Klineberg had not yet been contaminated. But as they grow up, the social milieu transmits ready-made opinions about other human groups.” (ref. 1)

The distortion of reality is not so serious in all cases, but in most cases our prejudices or stereotypes can create what is referred to in psychology as “the selective character of our perception”. This can be applied to racial prejudice or to any other kind of prejudices, such as religious, ethnic, political or economic prejudices.

Being aware of the type of distortion that these prejudices can produce in our perception of reality is the first step towards correcting them.

CROSS-REFERENCE

This kit suggests various workshops that broach the subject from different angles. For example, Workshop No. 4 deals more particularly with the question of minorities, while No. 6 tackles the question of refugees.

The content of this workshop links the objectives of at least three of the eight “peace treasures”. The most obvious is peace education, but there is also democracy, tolerance and the respect of human rights.

KEY MESSAGES

- Show that promoting peace through the understanding and respect of other cultures is not only desirable but possible and enriching for everyone.
- Intercultural understanding is not a “gift” that is given to some people and not to others. It requires an effort on our part and it involves knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- Intercultural education is a process: essentially it leads us to change an ethnocentric approach of looking at people to an open one, to consider that diversity (or difference) is not a threat or a danger but an enrichment and, therefore, to favour a positive view of cultural diversity.



PURPOSE/AIMS/OBJECTIVES

Make the participants aware that:

- Our view of the world is tainted/influenced by our culture, which has progressively formed/moulded our cultural identity.
- Communication between people of different cultures requires a special effort.
- Prejudices, stereotypes, caricatures, etc. are undoubtedly the main obstacle to a proper view of others, and everyone must make a conscious effort to eliminate them.
- If real peace is to be established within society and between different peoples, their respective cultures must be respected and recognised mutually.

METHOD AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVITY

Preparation

Required material:

- Blackboard or flipchart for plenary sessions.
- Markers.
- Cards with definitions (see below).
- Questions for groups 1 and 2, and 3 and 4 will be written either on cards or on flipchart sheets, one copy per small group.
- Four copies of the cards with definitions should be prepared, one per small group. (See Procedure common to the four groups, below.)
- Since the participants will be expected to write their commitments down at the end of the workshop, pieces of paper or a notebook should be available.

Implementation

Plenary session

1. Warm-up exercise

The leader briefly introduces the workshop, referring to the title and to the theme. He then asks the group to define, in a few key words, what is being sought. Volunteers raise their hands and suggest a word. For example:

D = Diversity
I = Intercultural learning
M = Mutual respect
T = Tolerance

2. Presentation of objectives and method

The list remains in front of the group (use blackboard or flipchart) and, taking the words on the list as a guide, the leader briefly presents the objectives of the workshop (see above) and stresses that they will be achieved in a very active, Scout way. He may decide to also make reference to some of the points of the background (such as culture, identity, etc.), but this should be done as briefly as possible.



3. Intercultural understanding: a detailed view Formation of small groups

There will be four groups of no more than 10 people each. Groups 1 and 2 will have the same task, as will groups 3 and 4. After the groups' tasks have been explained, the participants decide to which group they want to belong.

Each group needs a facilitator. The facilitator has cards with definitions of the most common terms used in intercultural education. The facilitator clarifies problems of terminology and helps the group advance, not letting them get bogged down by a definition but encouraging them to concentrate on their task.

Groups 1 and 2: "Imagine yourself from the outside"

As an American-Indian proverb says: "You cannot judge a person until you have walked five miles in his moccasins".

The group will have an exchange of views based on the following questions:

- What is the message of the proverb? What does it tell you personally?
- Have you ever tried to look at yourself from the outside? Have you ever tried to put yourself in "someone else's shoes"?
- If YES, what was the result? (Some volunteers recount their anecdotes.)
- What have you learned from that situation? Has it helped you understand yourself better? Has it helped you understand others better? In what way?

(NB: For obvious reasons, these questions are only a very broad and general guideline. The leader of the small group should feel free to conduct as free a discussion as possible.)

Groups 3 and 4: "Is it really fair?"

Participants sit in a circle. Each member of the group should know a joke, cartoon, caricature or saying about a foreigner, somebody from a different race/ethnic group, from a different culture or country, etc. They are invited to recount these to the group in turn. Then, together, the group evaluates/assesses:

- Is the joke, story, etc. really negative, derogatory, pejorative? If YES, why is that so?
- Is it likely to offend someone who feels affected by it? Is it likely to create ill feelings? ...to diminish their self-esteem?
- Is there a generalisation which affects a category of people (e.g. Jews, Arabs, homosexuals, punks, etc.)?
- Is it correct or incorrect? Fair or unfair? In each case, why?
- How would you feel if you were targeted by such a joke, cartoon, etc? How would you react if treated with contempt?
- General question as a conclusion: How would you like society to look at you? Is it not fair to say that you should look at others in the same way as you want them to look at you?

(NB: For obvious reasons, these questions are only a very broad and general guideline. The leader of the small group should feel free to conduct as free a discussion as possible.)



Examples of cards with definitions:

Nationalism: "Intense patriotic feeling; fervent attachment to the nation to which one belongs, sometimes combined with xenophobia and a separatist desire." Governments founded on this doctrine subject "all national policies to the development of the nation's power". (ref. 2)

Ethnocentrism: "Tendency to favour the social group to which one belongs and to make it the only reference model by which one judges other peoples and cultures." (ref. 3) Having been raised in a certain culture, we all have, to a greater or lesser extent, an ethnocentric attitude because we learn our culture as something that is second nature. But it is the exacerbation of that attitude that makes someone view people from other cultures as "strange, odd, funny, senseless, etc." which is regrettable.

Prejudice: As the etymology of the word suggests, a prejudice is a pre-conceived belief or opinion about someone or something without sufficient evidence and without having all the facts with which to make a judgement. Often, a prejudice is imposed by a milieu, era or education. It is a bias, a ready-made idea . (ref. 4)

Caricature: Exaggeration of the disagreeable, negative or ridiculous traits of someone so as to criticise them to better effect. To misrepresent someone through over-simplification. Used a lot in satire and parody. (ref. 5)



**Stereotype:**

A cliché or commonplace that reduces the singularities and accentuates the collective traits into a “rigid” view of a people or culture, which prevents us from examining how they could differ from such simplistic generalisation. (ref. 6)

Chauvinism:

Excessive, biased and exclusive admiration for one’s country. Sometimes expressed in the form of fanatical and aggressive patriotism. (ref. 7)

Racism (NB: see also “Discrimination” card):

Though sometimes intrinsically linked, these two concepts are different: racism is an attitude, whereas discrimination is a behaviour.

Racism stems from a “...theory on the hierarchy of races which concludes in the need to protect the so-called superior race from inter/crossbreeding, and in its right to dominate others.” (ref. 8) By extension, one speaks of “racism” when describing “violent hostility against a social group.” (ref. 9) Thus we talk about “racism against young people;” “racism against women;” etc.

Discrimination (NB: see also “Racism” card):

Though sometimes intrinsically linked, these two concepts are different: racism is an attitude, whereas discrimination is a behaviour. “To separate a social group from the rest by treating them unfairly.” (ref. 10) Historically, extreme forms of discrimination have taken place, for example by the Nazis towards Jews and gypsies, etc., and by the former regime of South Africa with its policy of apartheid.

NB: Definitions are taken from two sources: the “Le Robert” dictionary and the book “Education for Peace and Human Understanding” (see References below). Regarding the citations from the “Le Robert” dictionary, in most cases we have chosen the definition we considered the most appropriate to the intercultural approach of this workshop.



Plenary session

4. Conclusion (Challenge)

Using some of the words in the different group reports, the leader will ask: Is the idea of an integrated intercultural and tolerant society, living in peace at home and abroad, an (impossible) dream? If it is not impossible, let's make it a reality!

If it can become a reality, what can I do personally (in my Scout unit, family, school, community) to bring about the necessary changes?

Depending on the time available, participants may stay and write down (on a piece of paper, in a notebook or on the blackboard/flipchart) a personal idea, initiative or commitment in this direction.

REMARKS TO LEADERS

The nature of this workshop is a very sensitive one. At one point or another, sensitivities might be hurt by something that has been said or done, albeit unintentionally.

For that reason, it is important that the leader and the facilitators study the guide for the workshop and get together before the workshop to ensure that they are operating on the same wavelength. In particular, the terminology used should be as precise, "objective", neutral and positive as possible. Rehearsal would not be superfluous.

The definitions themselves should not become the subject of discussion. It is not a question of engaging in a quarrel over semantics! The definitions are there as an aid, if necessary. If they become an obstacle to the progress of the workshop, they should just be ignored.



SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP

The subject is vast and whole books have been devoted to it. Here we can only scratch the surface. A few ideas:

- In each society, at a certain time, there are problems of intercultural communication, prejudice and discrimination between the majority group (or groups) and one or more minority groups.
- This problem should not be viewed as an abstract definition, but identified in concrete terms in our own society.
- If we are going to engage in a discussion on it in Scouting, we should not forget that prejudice is quite often a very irrational attitude. It is important to discover the roots or origins in each concrete case, to explore its historical evolution, and to detect the mechanisms. The more this is done in a serious and honest way, the more one looks for truth, the better people are able to face prejudice with a positive attitude and free themselves from it.
- An honest and unbiased discussion on the subject requires us to identify prejudice in our own attitude and behaviour; to see it in ourselves, before looking for it in others.
- Finally, we have insisted that "intercultural education is a process". Therefore, do not expect participants in a workshop to change their attitudes immediately. Any change of this type falls within the realm of "value development". To be effective, it has to be slow.

SOURCES

The warm-up exercise has been inspired by section "An A-Z of actions for the campaign" included in the "All Different, All Equal education pack" published by the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe as a contribution to the "European Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance", European Youth Centre, 1st edition, September 1995, p. 62.

The definitions on the cards have been taken from two sources: the "Le Robert" dictionary (Ref. Le Robert, Nouveau petit dictionnaire de la langue française, No. 1, © Le Robert, Paris, 1993) and Chapter I of the book "Education for Peace and Human Understanding", published by the World Scout Bureau, Geneva, 1985.

REFERENCES

- 1) Article "Men and Colour", *World Scouting*, Oct./Dec. 1971.
- 2) *Le Robert, Nouveau petit dictionnaire de la langue française, No. 1*, © Le Robert, Paris, 1993, p. 1471.
- 3) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 831.
- 4) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 1761.
- 5) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 308.
- 6) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 2145.
- 7) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 356.
- 8) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 1848.
- 9) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 1848.
- 10) *Le Robert, op. cit.*, p. 655.

