The Project To-Gather: good practice in real life learning

Wim Kratsborn
Tutor at School of Education of Hanze University Groningen
Projectleader of To-Gather and the international minor ‘Your identity in Europe’

Abstract

In this article answers are given to the following questions: What was the starting point and what were the sources of inspiration for the project To-Gather? How is the concept closely linked to the society and to the youth of today? Why is the project called To-Gather? What are the sources of information? What’s the follow-up? Finally I hope that we will come to gather.

Key-words

Real life learning, Multiple intelligences, Field of view, Multiple choice identity

The starting point and the source of inspiration for the international project ‘To-Gather’ are young people, learning them to develop an identity in Europe or outside of Europe. That is why we designed a complete learning arrangement with five special learning routes for the age-groups between 3-6 years, 7-11 years, 12-16 years and 17-25 years. All groups work on the five core themes of To-Gather: Identity, Family and Friends, Good Work (ecological identity), Migration and Mobility, and the Other. The learning routes comprise of seven unique steps and every step is an important phase for the learning process towards active and democratic citizenship in Europe. At To-Gather, we use knowledge from different disciplines, European perspectives, places and cultural backgrounds. And we believe that it is important to use a broad range of sources of knowledge such as texts, images, paintings and especially music. Music is the energizer of the project as a sense-opener, source of knowledge, problem-solver and a way of communication, presentation and reflection. That is how we activate new learning-styles, such as multiple intelligences, systems thinking, digital learning, lateral thinking and creative learning.

The aims, the structure, the content and the learning-styles are related in the project To-Gather. This is called ‘synchronisation didactics’. That means we can use concrete
examples and good practice that proved very successful in practice: experiential learning. During the course you will experience all this and make it meaningful for yourself. This is learning by doing, based on the work and practice of more than 1000 young people and 75 teachers from all over Europe.

This is learning from and in reality: real life learning. It may seem ambitious but this is our way to respect you, the Other and Europe.

Since 2005 we have been working with young people between 3 and 25 years and since 2009 in 10 European countries: Latvia, Slovenia, Portugal, Denmark, Turkey, Hungary, Slovakia, Belgium, England and the Netherlands. Furthermore we have links to Sweden, Syria and Lebanon. Out of these collaborations emerged a lot of interesting learning and working material designed by teachers and young people from different European countries.

The theoretical aspect of the programme is based on the work of such influential thinkers like Howard Gardner, Fred Korthagen, Peter Sloterdijk, Anthony Giddens, Jeremy Rifkin, David Fromkin and Norman Davies.

In addition, we also cooperate with networks such as EMUNI, CiCe, ETEN and the Humanistic League as well as with musicians of bands like Audiofeel, Scanner, VanderLinde, Loreena McKennitt and Sigur ros.
Why is the project called To-Gather?

The first reason is to let teachers and young people meet and work/learn together. It's cooperative learning and real life learning in a dynamic way.

The second reason is the intercultural dialogue between young people from Europe and outside of Europe (Northern Africa and the Arab world). It is the gathering of the self and the other, thinking out of the box and searching the unknown.

The third reason is to gather theories and practical experiences (learning strategies and didactics). A multi-perspectivistic approach is realised by gathering multiple intelligences and multi-disciplines, the multiple choice identity and the multiple society. We designed a special organizer Field of View to get an overview from four different perspectives: past and future, theory and reality.

What are the sources of information?

One source is the flyer with the aims or seven reasons to come to gather. This is about the why, what, when, where, who and how. Another source or medium is the website where good practice, background information, highlights and news may be found. The website is also an important place to communicate and exchange ideas and material.

A third source is the toolkit, where 7 different tools are worked out in a key tool, a target tool, a change tool, a frame tool and a planning tool and finally in a route tool and material tool. This toolkit useful during the dissemination (training courses and conferences). You can use these tools to get an overview but also for the training of their students and teachers and for the transfer of the learning routes in practice.

A fourth source is the package of results of To-Gather inclusive learning routes, music-cds, the game, the story and clips. For example the song ‘Passenger in time’, the photos by Tadej Bernik and Zigurds Bilzonis, the film ‘The family’ and the clip ‘Come to gather’ are aesthetical visualisations of the concept.

Finally the book ‘It's hard to become who you are’ is a source for background information from different perspectives and disciplines, written by different co-writers from all over Europe (Robi Kroflic, Susana Goncalves, Layla Radjab, Sandra Rone, Henrik Bak, Marta Fülöp) the Arab world (Bassim Kaisi, Kinda Tabbah) and the USA (Howard Gardner). Chapter 1 ‘A story of Europe’ is about the history of Europe, Chapter 2 ‘Welcome to the multiple society’ describes the present, Chapter 3 ‘Plug in to gather’ explains the learning strategy in the project To-Gather, Chapter 4 ‘Braindrops’ is focussed on theory and Chapter 5 ‘The future is not what is was before’ on what has to be done in the future.
There are many European projects about citizenship and identity. What is the surplus value of the project To-Gather for Education? There are seven reasons to come to gather:

1) It is a complete learning arrangement with learning routes that learners and teachers may follow step by step in order to develop an own identity in Europe. The whole package or parts may be used flexibly to follow the learner from 3 till 25 years. Two music-cds, an educational game, clips, a story, a website and a book are produced. The focus is constantly on high quality in theory and didactics. Specific theoretical concepts are important and some concepts are ‘stolen’ from other projects such as systems-thinking, multiple intelligence and five minds for the future and other concepts are developed in the project itself such as the multiple society, the multiple choice identity, field of view and synchronisation didactics.

2) The learning arrangement is designed by teachers from 5 different countries and tested in pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education. The commitment and talent of all these teachers and learners makes it possible to take new learners into the flow in a sense-opened, knowledge-based, problem-oriented, communicative, productive, cooperative and reflective way. It’s hard fun.

3) It is in-service learning, because the focus is on hot items such as identity, family and friends, environment, migration and the other. It helps teachers and learners to solve problems in daily life or learning.
   - How may young people be motivated and fascinated?
   - How and why can Europe be meaningful for young people and Europe?
   - How can young people develop an own identity and become good democratic citizens?
   - How and why should other cultures be known, understood and respected?
   - How can old and new learning strategies be mixed and balanced such as knowledge and multiple intelligences, individual and cooperative learning, learner-centered and teacher-centered education?

4) To-Gather did grow in a natural and organic way during 25 years while working cooperatively with a variated group of people in many European projects. It is a sign of the times. It’s an up to date balance between knowledge and creativity, individual and cooperative learning, learner-centred and teacher-centred education.

5) Innovative learning strategies, theories and didactics are mixed and concretised in a multi-perspectivistic and multi-disciplinary way. The slogan is: ‘Teach what you preach’ by integrating in a concrete and applicable way music and drama, creative learning, systems-thinking, social constructivism, sustainable learning, real life learning, good work, five minds for the future and lifelong
learning. We are standing on the shoulders and the books of giants such as Howard Gardner, Peter Sloterdijk, Jeremy Rifkin, Jeffrey Sachs, Zygmunt Bauman, Kishore Mahbubani, Manuel Castels, Roger Scruton, James Taylor, David Fromkin, Norman Davies. Frank Ankersmit and Anthony Giddens.

6) To-Gather is linked to and cooperating with big European networks as CiCe and ETEN to disseminate the project. The cooperation with EMUNI is important to stimulate the intercultural dialogue with Northern Africa and the Arab world by organising the Summerschool ‘Come to gather’.

7) The project To-Gather is a creative artwork, using aesthetics such as (modern) music, art, drama, dance, design and photography. Musiccd’s, videoclips and photos are especially made for the project with the help of specialists and artists from all over Europe.

The follow-up?

The most important follow-up is the dissemination of the project at schools for primary, secondary and higher education in Europe by using the learning arrangement, inclusive the learning routes and the other material. The good news will also be spread at conferences, training courses for teachers and through the To-Gather Tour. The project To-Gather has been selected as a DIVA-project by the European Commission as good practice in education, culture and Europe.

A group of about 15 people are visiting the To-Gather Festival that is organised by one of the partners. The aim is to present the practical results, to meet with other teachers and to promote the project in Education.

The To-Gather Festivals are celebrated at all places such as Den Bosch, Liverpool, Haslev, Jurmala, Istanbul, Coimbra, Torhout, Damascus, Miskolc, Presov and Ljubljana. A festival consists of lectures, workshops and performances by the dancer Margarita Kamjaka and the rockbands Audiofeel or Vanderlinde.

Another follow-up is the international minor ‘Create your future’ for high talented students from February 2012 till July 2012 at Hanze University Groningen.

A creative result is the film ‘It’s hard to become who you are’ by Wim Kratsborn, featuring Duygu Akkaya as Europe. The film is about the turbulent and fascinating double life of Europe as a young woman of 27 years old and of young people in Europe, Northern Africa and the Arab world. The making of the film will be in 2011 and 2012.

Finally we are going to apply for an International Joint Master, starting in 2012. Partners may be universities in Liverpool, Coimbra, Istanbul, Riga, Ljubljana, Beirut, Damascus, Cairo and Groningen. In this way the project (2005-2011) will be concretely
implemented in education in Europe, Northern Africa and the Arab world.

‘It’s a long and winding road that leads to your door’ (Paul McCartney)

Correspondence

Wim Krasborn
Projectleader To-Gather 2009-2011
Pedagogische Academie, Kamer DO.10 – Hanzehogeschool Groningen
Zernikeplein 9
9747 AS Groningen
w.kratsborn@planet.nl