

EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK - WORKSHOP REPORT

Becoming Creative with the Exercise “Take a Step Forward” - Addressing Inequalities and Discrimination

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TOPIC / PROJECT DISCUSSED

The main issues addressed by our project are the inequalities and discrimination present in our societies, particularly related to those who are less privileged. One of the most impactful and well known dynamics used in Human Rights Education to tackle these issues is “Take a Step Forward”. For us, it proved to be a powerful experience for the people taking part in it.

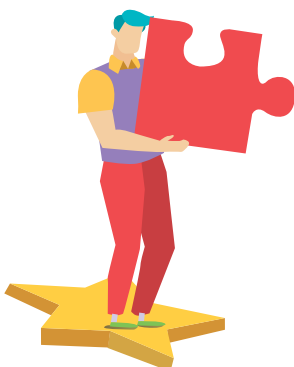
The workshop was centred around the method “Take a Step Forward”, one of the classic methods in NFE and featured in many compendia, such as Compass. The aim of the workshop was to raise awareness about this method but also to explore it further through the presentation of two adaptations implemented in Portugal: “The interview”, a role-play based on the plight of refugees and “It’s not torture, it’s empathy”, a street art / performance installation. These tools can be means to foster empathy and raise awareness of inequalities in our societies and provide a platform for the discussion of privilege and discrimination.

METHODOLOGY

The workshop started by presenting each other and the contact/ experience/ familiarity we had with refugees. In general, participants already had personal contacts with refugees, some also of working with them. The context of the workshop was presented, explaining the impact that “Take a Step Forward” had had on both, my colleague Jéssica Jacinto and me, as well as the structure of the workshop: presentation of two methods we developed, which pay homage to “Take a Step Forward” but want to develop it further. This was followed by a presentation of the work I did with refugees (see: <https://balkansteps.wordpress.com/> and <https://paxchristipeacestories.com/category/refugee-stories/>).

Using the method of “Where do you stand?” as an example, we then discussed different aspects of “role-play” activities, namely 1. how easy it is to get into a role, 2. the need for a large or small description of the character, 3. the preferred pace and rhythm of role-play, and 4. the usefulness (or not) of role-plays in general.

Most participants agreed that role-plays helped them to be more empathetic and to understand the situation of others more easily, with a small majority of preference regarding the description of roles. The issue of the ethics of appropriating someone else’s story (a requirement in role-plays) also came up and could or should have been dealt further.



Afterwards, participants tried out the role-play “The interview” in pairs, with one of them being an interviewer (for example, a ‘volunteer’, a ‘journalist engaged in refugee rights’, a ‘journalist working for a mainstream channel’ or a ‘psychologist’) and the other an interviewee (e.g. a ‘15-year-old refugee’, a ‘Syrian refugee in Turkey’, a ‘refugee who created their own NGO’ or a ‘migrant mother’). The feelings and emotions that this exercise brought up were shared and discussed, before moving on to the presentation of the second method.

The aim of this method is to bring “Take a Step Forward” into the street, either through performance, memorialization (monument type) or street action. An example of two essays made in Aveiro (Portugal) was presented and suggestions for improvement were received from the participants, such as to approach passers-by directly, or to turn the installation into a monument, as it had been done in cities like Budapest to pay homage to the victims of the Holocaust.

The final discussion allowed for further reflection on the usefulness of both methods in the participants’ own communities. Space for final feedback and reflection was offered.

KEY ISSUES RAISED SUCH AS CHALLENGES

- Regarding the first method presented: Appropriating stories of people who had faced many different struggles in life / the need of a frame to contextualize the role-play and make it easier to get into the role, and the difficulty of getting into such a different reality.
- For the second method: The difficulty presented was how to approach people and how to make them pay attention when there are so many other sources of “noise” in the street.

ROLE-PLAYS HELP TO BE MORE EMPATHETIC
AND TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION OF
OTHERS MORE EASILY.

INNOVATIVE RESPONSE(S) TO THOSE CHALLENGES

- Need of frame and context: One participant suggested that telling the story or separating people by role and briefing them on their mission could make it easier to understand the role-play.
- Approach people directly without fear of breaking both comfort zones (yours and that of the people called): One participant presented her own example of doing this and getting mostly positive reactions from passers-by.



KEY TRENDS IDENTIFIED (COMMONALITIES BETWEEN COMMENTS/PARTICIPANTS)

- Most participants find role-play activities useful to foster empathy and understand life stories of other people.
- Most participants also felt that, although it is not an obvious process, it is important to feel the situation of another person, even though this might bring up some ethical issues.
- Some people had never tried the method “Take a Step forward” or any role-play activity before.
- Some people got to know “Take a Step Forward” and will use it in the future.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

- Most people felt inspired and happy to get to know the method and what we are doing to pay homage to it.
- Feedback received through the app: *“Thanks for the workshop. I enjoyed the atmosphere and the practical component very much”.*



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