



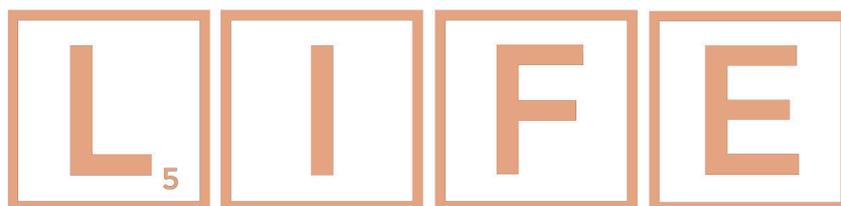
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LEARNING
INTERCULTURALITY
FROM RELIGION



Learning Interculturality From rEligion



PD&P Pedagogical Didactic and Participatory Model

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Introduction

In general terms, when in literature, sociology and politics we speak about religion we intend to make reference to a collection of cultural dimensions and visions of the world that are related to spirituality and to some aspects of the moral values. Religions have narratives, symbols, traditions, and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe.

In almost all the languages of the world it is possible to find words that have the same meaning of the English word for “religion”. However, the way the concept is conceived can appear very different and some have no word for religion at all. For example, the Sanskrit word "dharma," sometimes translated as “religion” also means “law”. Throughout classical South Asia, the study of law consisted of concepts such as penance through piety and ceremonial and practical traditions. Medieval Japan at first had a similar union between "imperial law" and universal or "Buddha law," but these later became independent sources of power. This leads Mircea Eliade to present a tautological explanation of what we intend as **sacred**, defined as that which is not profane; reflecting on his use of the term “profane” to encompass anything which is absolutely not sacred, he would have been better off defining **sacred** as anything that is not non-sacred. However, he prefers to stretch the definitions of words at will in order to make himself more legitimate and mask his inability to actually define what is **sacred** (though it is perhaps only definable in a tautological manner, as something relative to its inverse)

The usual definition of religion refers to a “belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods.” (Oxford dictionary) However, it is generally noted that this basic "belief in god" definition fails to capture the diversity of religious thought and experience. Edward Burnett Taylor defines religion in terms of "the belief in spiritual beings." In this definition lays the idea that is not appropriate to narrow the meaning of the religion in a belief in a supreme deity or in an expected judgment after death. It leads to the potential exclusion of many forms and expressions of religious cultural



dimensions and thus "has the fault of identifying religion rather with particular developments than with the deeper motive which underlies them." He also argued that the belief in spiritual beings exists in all known societies.

The sociologist Emile Durkheim, in his seminal book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things." By sacred things he meant things "set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Sacred things are not, however, limited to gods or spirits. On the contrary, a sacred thing can be "a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, a word, anything can be sacred." Religious beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends are the representations that express the nature of these sacred things and the virtues and powers that are attributed to them.

The development of religion has taken different forms in different cultures. Some religions place an emphasis on belief while others emphasize practice. Some religions focus on the subjective experience of the religious individual while others consider the activities of the religious community to be most important. Some religions claim to be universal, believing their laws and cosmology are binding for everyone, while others are intended to be practiced only by a closely-defined or localized group. In many places religion has been associated with public institutions such as education, hospitals, family, government, and political hierarchy. One modern academic theory of religion, i.e. social constructionism, says that religion is a modern concept that has been defined relative to the Abrahamic religions and that thus, religion as a concept has been applied inappropriately to non-Western cultures that are not based upon such systems.

After having explored the cultural and anthropological dimension of religion, we can assume that believing is a state of the mind. Everybody has beliefs about life and the world they experience. Mutually supportive beliefs may form belief systems, which may be religious, philosophical or ideological.

According to the *Compass Manual of the Human Rights of the Council of Europe*: "Religions are belief systems that relate humanity to spirituality"¹. The following definition provides a good overview of the different dimensions of religion: it is a collection of cultural systems,

¹ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/religion-and-belief>



belief systems, and world views that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe. They tend to derive morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle from their ideas about the cosmos and human nature. Many religions have organized behaviors, clergy, a definition of what constitutes adherence or membership, congregations of laity, regular meetings or services for the purposes of veneration of a deity or for prayer, holy places (either natural or architectural), and/or scriptures. The practice of a religion may also include sermons, commemoration of the activities of a god or gods, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture. However, there are examples of religions for which some or many of these aspects of structure, belief, or practices are absent. In the simplest sense, religion describes “the relationship of human beings to what they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual or divine”. It is usually accompanied by a set of organized practices which foster a community of people who share that faith.

As discussed above, belief is a broader term and it also includes “commitments which deny a dimension of existence beyond this world”. Religions and other belief systems in our environment have an influence on our identity, regardless of whether we consider ourselves religious or spiritual or not. At the same time, other parts of our identity, our history, our approach to other religions and groups considered “different” will influence how we interpret that religion or belief system. Religions and other belief systems in our environment have an influence on our identity, regardless of whether we consider ourselves religious or spiritual or not. At the same time, other parts of our identity, our history, our approach to other religions and groups considered “different” will influence how we interpret that religion or belief system”. This definition should encounter the agreement of the majority of believers and non-believers, even if the “state of mind” of those that declare to be “atheist” or “agnostic” is variate and not simple to define, containing different and various categories and ideas.

Considering religion as a “state of mind” and having stated the right to express this inner nature of the people, the question is if it is possible or useful to teach religion. In November 2007 the OSCE published its “Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs



in Public Schools” (ISBN 83-60190-48-8). These were prepared by its panel of experts on freedom of religion or belief. They concluded that Teaching about religions and beliefs may be adapted to take into account the needs of different national and local school systems and traditions. Teaching about religions and beliefs is an important responsibility of schools, which should prepare young people for life in a plural society. However, the manner in which this teaching takes place in schools should not undermine or ignore the critical role of families and religious or belief organizations. Families, together with religious or belief communities, are responsible for the moral education of future generations. Working together, families, religious and belief organizations, and Schools can promote mutual understanding by teaching respect for the rights of others.



Reasons for Teaching about Religions and Beliefs

There are several compelling reasons for teaching about religions and beliefs, all of which are reinforced when this type of teaching occurs in the context of commitment to religious freedom and human rights. These include:

- Religions and beliefs are important forces in the lives of individuals and communities and therefore have great significance for society as a whole. Understanding these convictions is necessary if people are to understand one another in our diverse societies, and also if they are to appreciate the significance of the rights that protect them.

- Learning about religions and beliefs contributes to forming and developing self-understanding, including a deeper appreciation of one's own religion or belief. Studying about religions and beliefs opens students' minds to questions of meaning and purpose and exposes students to critical ethical issues addressed by humankind throughout history.

- Much history, literature and culture is unintelligible without knowledge of religions and beliefs. Therefore study about religions and beliefs is an essential part of a well-rounded education. Learning about religions and beliefs forms part of one's own stock of education, broadens one's horizon and deepens one's insight into the complexities of both past and present.

- Knowledge of religions and beliefs can help promote respectful behavior and enhance social cohesion. In this sense, all members of society, irrespective of their own convictions, benefit from knowledge about the religious and belief systems of others².

It appears very evident that Religion can be considered as one of the most relevant conflictual factors in the world. But it is also evident how Religion is the moral reference for billions of people in the World and it is to be considered the main factor of a cultural identity that through a shared belief can bring together racial and geographical different communities. The word Religion itself comes from the Latin *religare*, that can be translated as "to bind back together." Religion is an expression of the human beings that has the power to bind people and communities, but has also the power to create contrasts and conflicts. In the reason itself of this paradox lies the answer to the question why a powerful insistent of solidarity became the major reasons of conflicts and divisions. Today even those who attend religious services

² TOLEDO GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON TEACHING ABOUT RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2007



and profess to be devout may never have thought deeply about the fundamentals of their faith and are in general not interested in knowing better the religion of others.

According to a recent article published in the U.S. “This is something like learning geography by memorizing the names and capitals of all the states, but never finding out about other countries and continents which lie beyond the borders”.³ Conflicts between religions and the rise of religious fundamentalisms worldwide provoked violence in many parts of the World and more and more people refuse to study deeply the meaning of the basic questions to which the religious faith intends to answer. The possibility to contrast the phenomena of religious fundamentalism is promoting in education the religious literacy and making possible and familiar to the students the philosophical approach to their faith, including knowing better other religions.

In school we study many elements of the artistic and cultural expressions of the humanity and religion is part of it. Starting from a religion, not merely meant as cultural expression but as a part of inner expression of the human condition, it is possible to build a progressive and evolutionary approach in the students that can lead to consider also the alternative religion beliefs as respectful and positive to the same extent. It is very important to think about the idea that teaching religions is a neutral educative position. Is it possible to teach religion without a religion? The experience shows that we are in need to start from one religion, with a positive attitude and openness to other expressions, but teaching cultural religious expressions or history of religions is to be considered something different.

The Model proposes the idea that teaching Religion is an effort of understanding and reciprocal comprehension. The main goal is reflecting on the approach to the main questions the human beings are naturally inclined to find an answer. The answer, or better, the answers cannot be figured out turning to the rational and cultural side of the human thought, but to deal with another way of understanding and thinking. The deep questions related to the inner side of the humanity require an articulated approach, composed by spirituality, inquiry attitude and even rationality. The main idea of the Model is, through the method of the inquiry, making possible to accustom the students to the attitude of asking fundamental questions and finding answers at the end of a process of building their own humanity.

³ Richard Schiffman, UffPost, 2012



Multi-culturalism and inter-culturalism: a political and educative overview

All living cultures are outcomes of intercultural communication. This becomes particularly evident in the globalization era where the ever-fast evolving cultural landscape is characterized by an intensified diversity of peoples, communities and individuals who live more and more closely. The in-creasing diversity of cultures, which is fluid, dynamic and transformative, implies specific competences and capacities for individuals and societies to learn, re-learn, and unlearn so as to meet personal fulfilment and social harmony. The ability to decipher other cultures in fair and meaningful ways is predicated not only on an open and pluralistic spirit but also on self-cultural awareness. When a culture is critically aware of its own strengths and limitations, it can extend its horizons and enrich its intellectual and spiritual resources by learning from alternative visions in epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and worldview. Approaching cultural diversity requires that the broadest possible range of competences be identified and promoted, especially those that societies have devised and transmitted throughout succeeding generations.

Because intercultural interactions have become a constant feature of modern life, even in the most traditional societies, the very manner in which individuals and communities manage encounters with cultural others is under scrutiny. Hence the growing awareness among policy-makers and civil society that intercultural competences may constitute a very relevant resource to help individuals negotiate cultural boundaries throughout their personal encounters and experiences. Intercultural competences are abilities to adeptly navigate complex environments marked by a growing diversity of peoples, cultures and lifestyles, in other terms, abilities to perform “effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006). Schools are a central place to nurture such skills and abilities and given their relevance for social and political life, the scope of intercultural competences is much wider than formal education. They have to reach out to a new generation of citizens, notably young men and women who have unimagined opportunities for global conversations.



Understanding Multiculturalism

A very sensitive idea about teaching and learning religion is pivoting around the concept of multi-culturalism. In general lines, the concept of multiculturalism in education is related to “any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. At the classroom level, for example, teachers may modify or incorporate lessons to reflect the cultural diversity of the students in a particular class. In many cases, “culture” is defined in the broadest possible sense, encompassing race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, and “exceptionality”—a term applied to students with special needs or disabilities. Generally speaking, multicultural education is predicated on the principle of educational equity for all students, regardless of culture, and it strives to remove barriers to educational opportunities and success for students from different cultural backgrounds. In practice, educators may modify or eliminate educational policies, programs, materials, lessons, and instructional practices that are either discriminatory toward or insufficiently inclusive of diverse cultural perspectives. Multicultural education also assumes that the ways in which students learn and think are deeply influenced by their cultural identity and heritage, and that teaching culturally diverse students effectively requires educational approaches that value and recognize their cultural backgrounds. In this way, multicultural education aims to improve the learning and success of all students, particularly students from cultural groups that have been historically underrepresented or that suffer from lower educational achievement and attainment”⁴.

In more deep cultural terms the critic to a homogenizing education was born inside the Frankfurt School of social research in the 1930s. Originally, the concept was defined as a means of addressing a multitude of inequalities both structural and institutional that are taking place in modern education establishments within multicultural settings. After the origins thinkers and activists such as the Brazilian revolutionary thinker Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Prof. Peter McLaren of UCLA, amongst others, developed the idea concluding that

⁴ <http://edglossary.org/multicultural-education/>



popular and democratic education is a tool of emancipation for the economically downtrodden, but it goes much further, is much wider in scope and is rooted in critical theory. Strictly linked to the social changes, nowadays the aspects of the multiculturalism in education had been extended to the changes related to the new “melting pot” society and is lined as a form of education “for all” that instils in the students the ability to bring about social change and to take advantages of them. Originally related to the mechanisms of inequality, in modern terms it is related to different styles and strategies of teaching and providing instruction to students whose cultural origins are different. Within critical multiculturalism, adopting a critical pedagogy can help students to develop a consciousness of freedom, to recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action based on this knowledge. Like critical theory, a critical pedagogy draws on social sciences and humanities, but more importantly it also draws on the ideas of feminism, Anarchism, and, within a contemporary context, ecology.

For what is related to the definition of multiculturalism and its links with teaching and learning religion, we have to underline that the concept of multiculturalism is varying as more situations occur. A practical example is well defined by the refugees crisis that leads the civil society to a new (and unexpected) debate. As we try to define multiculturalism we intend to involve the diverse perspectives that society develops and maintains through different backgrounds and different ethnic and cultural dimensions. We can say that with the term Multiculturalism we intend the acceptance or better the promotion of various ethnic cultures. Accepting the cultures and their social impact we accept the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities or nations.

In this context, multiculturalists advocate extending equitable status to distinct ethnic and religious groups without promoting any specific ethnic, religious, and/or cultural community values as central. Multiculturalism should preserve the ideals of equality, equity, freedom and respect for individuals and groups as a fundamental principle for the success of a nation. Europe is becoming more and more a multi-cultural area. Starting from the post-war era some European Countries experienced an increase of the immigration rate due to deficiency of labor and to the end of the colonialism era. During the 80’s, people came from Maghreb and



from some Asian Countries. This phenomena accompanied the “internal” immigration among the EU new states. New religions Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Buddhists started populating the towns. After the “Enlargement” of the European Union, the immigration load of the early seventies and 1990s made EU an ethnically and religiously diverse community. The idea that the immigrant would ultimately merge and become part of the host culture which was given in mid-50s was progressively rejected. These communities develop their own cultural values. Racial tension increased and by the end of 1980s immigrants were subjected to unprovoked racist attacks. This resulted in the notion that immigration and race relations were politically controversial issues and there was a growing campaign to introduce immigration controls. This debate is nowadays still very actual and the idea of controlling the immigration flows is a problem that the actual governments are in charge to discuss. The idea of controlling the flows is not new: in UK and France during the 1950s certain control measures were adopted to reduce the influx to UK as the number of northern Africans, West Indian, Indian and Pakistani immigrants increased. But in spite of the strict immigration policy the population of immigrants is still growing and the event represented by the “Brexit” will pose new and controversial questions. The huge majority of new citizens come from Africa (32%) and Asia (40%), the largest three groups being people from Maghreb, India and South America. This resulted in changes to the “European way of life” and the EU became to be a multicultural community. This reality is still not always accepted by EU citizens and recently the term multiculturalism is becoming a contested concept both in sociological discourse and in recent policy making.

The term multiculturalism is generally thought to have arisen in Britain by the Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins in 1966. This term is common current in all the EU countries, anyway there are often instances in particular at local level that consider this term with negative meaning. This opinion trends intend to exclude minority cultures while promoting the values of the dominant white culture. Multiculturalism is also a term which describes aspects of social policy. Multiculturalism is used in a number of ways which can serve either to celebrate difference or to act as a cover for what, in any real terms, is another form of enforced



assimilation. It also needs to be recognized that diverse ethnic groups now consist of large numbers of people who were born in the Country. The actual society discovered a progressive lack of religious and spiritual influences represented by the profession of a religion on people. Most of the people born in EU define themselves as atheist, however according to Phil Zuckerman, (*The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007, p. 59, ISBN 0-521-60367-6) the general number of people worldwide that declared to be atheist is in great decline. This could be due to the natality rate of the country with a religious majority. Most of the immigrants that come in EU declared to be religious and to believe in god. This perspective implies a potential new argument for the debate about the teaching of religion in schools.



Multiculturalism and Common values

The debate about the role of the school in teaching common laic values is very relevant. A good example of this debate can be taken in USA. In [2012 Josephson Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth](#). According to this result it was possible to reveal “a pressing need to integrate elements of character education into the country’s public-school curriculums. According to the study, 57 percent of teens stated that successful people do what they have to do to win, even if it involves cheating. Twenty-four percent believe it is okay to threaten or hit someone when angry. Thirty-one percent believe physical violence is a big problem in their schools. Fifty-two percent re-ported cheating at least once on an exam. Forty-nine percent of students reported being bullied or harassed for ethnic or cultural differences in a manner that seriously has upset them” Most of the pedagogues affirm that developing citizenship and teaching religion are to be considered different. And this point has a consistency.

However, the processes of citizens’ identification with civil society and political structures imply that to be educated in an holistic approach on the interpersonal and intrapersonal level is a necessary condition for both the social and the political dimension. Creating a dimension of Citizenship can aim at different social, cultural and political practices. The idea of educating for democracy has been strongly advocated by Dewey. He proposed a ‘democratic way of life’, democracy as lifestyle. Citizenship development is about knowledge, skills and attitudes (values), and the combination of these elements is often referred to as competences. Knowledge and skills are important. For a democratic society to flourish, it is necessary to know about democracy, to have the competences to act democratically. However, what is crucial are the values, the will to behave democratically. According to many sociological analyses, the actual societies need citizens who are flexible and reflective. What Donald Schon referred to as reflection-in-action. In education this calls for a practice in which youngsters reflect on their behavior, take responsibility for their actions, and try out to behave differently, in an experimental and reflective manner. The reflective paradigm has had considerable influence on the thinking about teacher education. Prospective teachers in reflective- oriented teacher education practice are continuously challenged to inquiry their beliefs and their teaching behavior.



Donald Schon argues that social systems must learn to become capable of transforming themselves without intolerable disruption. In this, 'dynamic conservatism' plays an important role. A learning system must be one in which dynamic conservatism operates at such a level and in such a way as to permit change of state without intolerable threat to the essential functions the system fulfils for the self. Our systems need to maintain their identity, and their ability to support the self-identity of those who belong to them, but they must at the same time be capable of transforming themselves. (Schon 1973: 57). Schon's great innovation at this point was to explore the extent to which companies, social movements and governments were learning systems – and how those systems could be enhanced. He suggests that the movement toward learning systems is, of necessity, 'a groping and inductive process for which there is no adequate theoretical basis' (*op. cit.*). The business firm, Donald Schon argues, is a striking example of a learning system. He charts how firms moved from being organized around products toward integration around 'business systems' (*ibid.*: 64). In an argument that has found many echoes in the literature of the '**learning organization**' some twenty years later, Donald Schon makes the case of learning that isn't simply something that is individual. Learning can also be social: A social system learns whenever it acquires new capacity for behavior, and learning may take the form of undirected interaction between systems [...] Government as a learning system carries with it the idea of *public learning*, a special way of acquiring new capacity for behavior in which government learns for the society as a whole. In public learning, government undertakes a continuing, directed inquiry into the nature, causes and resolution of our problems.

The need for public learning carries with it the need for a second kind of learning. If government is to learn to solve new public problems, it must also learn to create the systems for doing so and discard the structure and mechanisms grown up around old problems (Schon 1973: 109).



The Model: pedagogical implications

The model is based on the approaches sealed to the theory known as Constructivism, an innovative philosophy of knowing, learning and assigning meaning to the world and the phenomena associated with it. In generic terms Constructivist approaches and instructional strategies are considered to be based on the position of the students in the learning process: being in a centered-position allows greater interaction with their respective environments. It is not this paper the place to study and analyze the semantic meaning of the term ‘constructivism’ and its consequences in education, for which influences and for a deepest idea about the theory see the indication presented in the bibliography.

The application of the Model follows the idea that knowledge is the final goal of a personal and community research addressed “to generate knowledge and meaning from experience” (*Facets of Systems Science*, George Klir, 1932). According to many authors, constructivism is a theory of knowledge with roots in philosophy, psychology, and cybernetics. It is based on two main principles:

- Knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the learners and the teachers is in this process have the role of facilitator;
- The action of cognition is adaptive and serves to organize the world that is experienced by the learner, and not necessarily the discovery of ontological reality.

The Model intends to retake and actualize the Montessori idea of learning as research and discover that needs a specific learning environment. Given that constructivism focuses on learners’ ability to solve real-life problems, it not only encourages the learner to arrive at a unique solution, it also pays close attention to the process of arriving at the solution. And in this way the problems related to the main questions of humanity are to be considered as “real life problems” since related to the position of the man beings in the world. Problem-oriented activities that are contextual, relevant and of great interest to learners. Learners may select a problem on their own or a teacher may construct one for them.



According to the opinion of many authors, the constructivist idea of learning takes into account prior knowledge. That means that the facilitator's approach provides the competences for enhancing and promoting debate, where the knowledge is the result of a discover. If prior knowledge is to be considered not scientifically correct, re-analyzing the contents and defining new perspectives is the task of the learner. One of the authors of the theory that is defined as "radical constructivism" profoundly influenced by the theories of Piaget, suggests to break with convention for developing a theory of knowledge in which knowledge does not reflect an objective, ontological reality but exclusively an ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experience" (von Glaserfeld, 1984, p.24). In his book, 'Radical Constructivism: A Way of Knowing and Learning', Glaserfeld states that "To the constructivist, concepts, models, theories, and so on are viable if they prove adequate in the contexts in which they were created." This view stems from an ideology that knowledge and reality do not have an objective or absolute value. Reality is unknown and can only be interpreted by the knower, and then it may cease to be the reality. Hence it is the knower who interprets and constructs a reality based on her experiences and interactions with the environment.



Defining Constructivism in the Model: why teaching religion with an approach based on experience and discovering

From a functional and pedagogy perspective, constructivism may be defined as an approach or strategy to create a learning environment, or organize an environment where learners solve problems situated in personally relevant contexts, the experience of which helps them build new knowledge. More than problem-solving this process in the case of religions may be defined as inquiry. The experience in defining and analysing answers, whose nature is not to be found in a rational world is part of the personal set of knowledge that comes from different experiences and social relationships among which the more relevant is the familiar context. For these reasons, the competence in inquiring and solving problems, that required a specific philosophic and spiritual dimension, in that particular context is what constitutes learning together with the knowledge related to a deeper understanding of other religions expressions and the attitude to discuss with peers that are involved in other contexts. The apparent absence of a specific learning goal or a single correct solution, the need to collaborate with other human resources and receiving specific or general direction and guidance from a facilitator is what determines this approach as constructivist. Being quite evident the relevant emphasis on the process of problem-solving, it is the case to specify that discussing and learning religion and using the inquiry method for finding solutions and pathways implies the presence of multiple ways to discuss and approaching problems also encourages a great deal of alternative ways of thinking about the problem and that can lead to the development of analytical skills and a creative output.

It is also worth specifying that in this area we are in need to clarify the terms “problem-solving” to which we make a lot of references. In religious and inter-religious teaching and learning, the solution is not unidirectional. Some students may feel that it is even difficult to change their opinion about the creed and certainties, but what they are expected to learn is the ability to accept the idea of the other and to use the term of the approach based on the inquiry for building the ownership of the knowledge, not to be based in the traditional concepts delivered by their traditional context. The goal of the Life approach is to have more



knowledge about the traditional religion the students believe in and a deeper knowledge of the human values of other religions, being either able to a discussion and positive confrontation.

In the LIFE model, constructivist pedagogy intends to take advantage the potential for developing higher order thinking skills. Constructivism, connected with the inquiry approach, can generate internal or intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can generate more genuine and long-term interest in learning a subject as religion than the motivation externally supplied by means of external rewards like high grades.



The Pedagogical Teaching Religion Model (PTRM)

PRINCIPLES

Constructivism: theory based on observation and scientific study about how people learn. It says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Persons are **active creators of their own knowledge**. To do that, they must ask questions, explore, and assess what we know.

- *Teaching practice: encouraging students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. The teacher makes sure he/she understands the students' preexisting conceptions, and guides the activity to address them and then build on them.*

Collaborative Learning: method of teaching and learning in which **students team together** to explore a significant question or create a meaningful project. A group of students discussing a lecture or students from different schools working together over the Internet on a shared assignment are both examples of collaborative learning.

Cooperative Learning is a specific kind of Collaborative Learning: students work together in small **groups** on a structured activity. They are individually accountable for their work, and the work of the group as a whole is also assessed. Cooperative groups work face-to-face and **learn to work as a team**. In small groups, students can share **strengths** and also develop their weaker **skills**. They develop their **interpersonal** skills. They learn to deal with **conflict**. When cooperative groups are guided by clear objectives, students engage in numerous activities that improve their **understanding** of subjects explored.

Three things are necessary to create a Cooperative Learning Environment:

- Students need to feel safe, but also challenged.
- Groups need to be small enough that everyone can contribute.
- The task students work together on must be clearly defined.



The cooperative and collaborative learning techniques presented here should help make this possible for teachers. Also, in cooperative learning small groups provide a place where:

- learners actively participate;
- teachers become learners at times, and learners sometimes teach;
- respect is given to every member;
- projects and questions interest and challenge students;
- diversity is celebrated, and all contributions are valued;
- students learn skills for resolving conflicts when they arise;
- members draw upon their past experience and knowledge;
- goals are clearly identified and used as a guide;
- research tools such as Internet access are made available;
- students are invested in their own learning.



The Model in Action

“I believe it is our responsibility as teachers not only to purvey the chemistry but also to enable and encourage students to learn how to learn” (Johnstone)

10 EDUCATIONAL COMMANDMENTS:

1. What you learn is controlled by what you already know and understand.
2. How you learn is controlled by how you have learned successfully in the past.
3. If learning is to be meaningful it has to link on to existing knowledge and skills enriching and extending both.
4. The amount of material to be processed in unit time is limited.
5. Feedback and reassurance are necessary for comfortable learning, and assessment should be humane.
6. Cognizance should be taken of learning styles and motivation.
7. Students should consolidate their learning by asking themselves about what is going on in their own heads.
8. There should be room for problem solving in its fullest sense to exercise and strengthen linkages.
9. There should be room to create, defend, try out, and hypothesize.
10. There should be opportunity given to teach (you don't really learn till you teach).

1. What you learn is controlled by what you already know and understand.

1st Step - What the students know about religion/What is religion Preliminary discussion (all the class take part) (1hour)

2. How you learn is controlled by how you have learned successfully in the past.

2nd Step - what do you know because you studied it (ask the class the experienced in the past)

3. If learning is to be meaningful it has to link on to existing knowledge and skills enriching and extending both.



3rd step - Answering questions: the Model provides a list of questions related to religion.

The theory under this approach is: *it is not possible to teach religion without going through the nature and the narration of a specific religion. The aim of the model is not proposing “how to study history of the religions” but experimenting in the study of the religions, the impact of the multiculturalism.*

*Nature and conceptual dimension of the **Questions***: the discussion should be lead avoiding any problem related to the conceptual expressions. It is important for the children that their language can be franc and not influenced by the dogmatic positions of others (parents, other teachers etc...).

Wittgenstein's beetle in the box - This one's also known as the **Private Language Argument** and it's somewhat similar to Mary the Neuroscientist. In Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, he proposed a thought experiment that **challenged the way we look at introspection and how it informs the language we use to describe sensations**. For the thought experiment, Wittgenstein asks us to imagine a group of individuals, each of whom has a box containing something called a “beetle”. No one can see into anyone else's box. Everyone is asked to describe their beetle but each person only knows their own beetle. But each person can only talk about their own beetle, as there might be different things in each person's box. Consequently, Wittgenstein says the subsequent descriptions cannot have a part in the “language game.” Over time, people will talk about what is in their boxes, but the word “beetle” simply ends up meaning “that thing that is in a person's box.”

Why is this bizarre thought experiment disturbing? The mental experiment points out that the beetle is like our minds, and that we can't know exactly what it is like in another individual's mind. We can't know exactly what other people are experiencing, or the uniqueness of their perspective. It's an issue that's very much related to the so-called *hard problem of consciousness and the phenomenon of qualia*.

4. The amount of material to be processed in unit time is limited.

We have to stimulate the discussion after the end of the hour.



Feedback and reassurance are necessary for comfortable learning, and assessment should be humane.

The discussion is guided by the teacher that plays the role of facilitator.

- **WHAT** - Teachers should develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. They act as guides, mediators, consultants, instructors, and advocates for the students, helping to effectively connect their culturally- and community-based knowledge to the classroom learning experiences.
- **WHY** - Ladson-Billing (1995) notes that a key criterion for culturally relevant teaching is nurturing and supporting competence in both home and school cultures. Teachers should use the students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge and skills. Content learned in this way is more significant to the students and facilitates the transfer of what is learned in school to real-life situations (Padron, Waxman & Rivera, 2002).

- **HOW:**

Learn about students' cultures

- Have students share artifacts from home that reflect their culture
- Have students write about traditions shared by their families
- Have students research different aspects of their culture

Vary teaching approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles and language

proficiency

- Initiate cooperative learning groups (Padron, Waxman & Rivera, 2002)
- Have students participate in book clubs or literature circles (Daniels, 2002)
- Use student-directed discussion groups (Brisk & Harrington, 2000)
- Speak in ways that meet the comprehension and language development needs of ELLs

(Yeldin, 2004)

Utilize various resources in the students' communities

- Have members of the community speak to students on various subjects
- Ask members of the community to teach a lesson or give a demonstration (in their field of expertise) to the students



· Invite parents to the classroom to show students alternative ways of approaching a problem (e.g., in math: various ways of dividing numbers, naming decimals, etc.)

6. Cognizance should be taken of learning styles and motivation.

The teachers should spend time for explaining why they are doing this discussion.

7. Students should consolidate their learning by asking themselves about what is going on in their own heads.

The Method is based on QUESTIONS, so teachers must explain what a question is in Philosophy.

8. There should be room for problem solving in its fullest sense to exercise and strengthen linkages

The Method is based on INQUIRY, which is defined as “a seeking for truth, information, or knowledge - seeking information by questioning”.

A Context for Inquiry - Unfortunately, our traditional educational system has worked in a way that discourages the natural process of inquiry. Students become less prone to ask questions as they move through the grade levels. In traditional schools, students learn not to ask too many questions, instead to listen and repeat the expected answers.

9. There should be room to create, defend, try out, and hypothesize.

In the discussion everyone is free to express his/her own opinion but opinions have to be based on Facts or Biographic Narration.

10. There should be opportunity given to teach (you don't really learn till you teach).

The Teachers (religion teachers or others) are to be free to present their own teaching style.



List of questions to be discussed (exemplum)

- Can science ever replace religion? (Prof. Bruce Hood)
- Why should scientists care about religion? (Prof. Robert McCauley)
- Do people become more or less religious with age? (Prof. Jacqueline Woolley)
- **If** humans are special, and the Earth is the only planet with intelligent life (at least as intelligent as humans), then why go to the trouble of creating the cosmos? Why bother creating hundreds of billions of galaxies, and thousands of billions of stars?
 - **Why** does a perfect God – who is all powerful and has all knowledge – requires us to praise Him by going to the Church/Mosque?

Realizing the method together

1. ***Discussing your contribution***

After having discussed the Method during the meeting, FVM will ask contribution to take part in a Meeting (TELCO) for defining the final version of the Model.

Creating the list of Questions (10 per Partner).

2. ***Experimenting the Method with teachers***

During the Fall School: Meeting with the teachers to explain and discuss the Method.

3. ***Experimenting the Method in schools***

- Presenting the aim of the Inquiry Focus activity
- Proposing the list of Questions,
- Diving the pupils in small groups (5-6)
- Discussing the Questions with the pupils (3 Hours) in more than one session if the case
- Creating the cooperative answers (2 hours)



4. *Creating Videos for the Questions*

(Some of the questions should be presented by religious experts and philosophers.

Presenting the Questions does not mean giving indications for the answers)

- The Video should last 5 Minutes (Max)
- It will be embedded in the Platform



LIFE Pedagogical Model

Suggestions for the Teacher - Before developing a discussion about religion you should be sure that during the debate an Appropriate Modes of Address will be respected. In general, it is a good practise to ask what name or form of address students prefer in defining their religion. During class discussions, should be used to refer to students by name as much as possible. Correct pronunciation of names is very important, as it demonstrates cultural awareness and respect. Remember – if you are in doubt, check with students. You should encourage using inclusive language that avoids ethnocentric tones.

It is very important to avoid any **Classroom Incivilities**:

- Establish explicit ground-rules for appropriate classroom conduct to protect against cultural exclusion and insensitivity;
- Communicate, verbally and non-verbally, high expectations for displaying mutual respect toward all students;
- Encourage students to negotiate an accepted “code of conduct” and set of disciplinary measures for inappropriate classroom behaviour;
- Respond promptly to any behaviour (verbal or non-verbal) that could be considered prejudiced, biased or discriminatory in nature. Do not tolerate racist, sexist or culturally insensitive comments made by students;
- Avoid ignoring or neglecting the needs of individual students. For example, ensure you do not have a tendency to favour one group over another when answering questions;
- Avoid stereotypes and preconceived assumptions in your teaching practices and content of the discussions;
- When presenting information on cultural and linguistic diverse individuals or minority groups, clearly cite published literature and research findings, rather than expressing your personal opinion. Similarly, encourage students to draw on diverse data sources/evidence to develop their arguments and critique opinions.
- It is also very important to encourage **Open and Inclusive Classroom Discussion**:



- Prompt students to ask questions by using open-ended statements, such as “Would anyone like to share a different opinion or perspective?”
- Avoid singling out individual students or putting anyone “on the spot”, particularly when discussing culturally or personally sensitive issues. For example, a student will feel pressured if it is assumed they can speak on behalf of all people from their country or culture of origin;
- Promote turn taking when discussing controversial issues. For example, ensure students take turns expressing their own opinions while also listening to (and genuinely considering) the views of others;
- Ask students how they prefer to learn, and, where possible, examine how you might adapt your teaching and learning activities accordingly.

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How to Use the Questions - Part A: Setting up the discussion

It is quite important to decide on the purpose of the discussion and selected the question/s. Then start with clearly devising one or more intended learning goals to be achieved through the discussion, explaining why we are doing it! The teacher is a facilitator and has to ensure that the discussion is built around appropriate over-arching issues. It is very important to ensure that the 'answer' to the question is something that requires an elaborate response.

Part B: Conduction of the discussion

Develop a few subsidiary questions or thought-provoking statements that will help the discussion on its way. The teacher should think ahead to issues or topics that should be raised if the answer is to be thorough;

Research the background information: even though the teacher will not be directly delivering information to students (that is the purpose of having the discussion), as the teacher/facilitator, he/she still needs to know the topic area thoroughly.

Consider the students' prior ideas and decide together with them what they need to know before being able to take part in a discussion. The more students know about the topic, the deeper their discussion is likely to be. If students don't have enough knowledge about the topic, the session may end up being a teacher-led exposition.

The approach to the discussion **has to be as much spontaneous and emotional as possible**. Thus the teacher can decide to develop the discussion without asking to prepare information previously. At the end of the discussion the teacher is suggested to create a **list of topics** and ask the students to deep their knowledge providing information or researching them. In order to make the culture of the religion and the reciprocal understanding stronger, the teacher can invite the students to enlarge the discussion to their partner context and can decide to invite some parents in class in order to open a discussion to the family environment. At the end of the activity it is very important to take a record of the discussion and to share the results with the students asking them to "approve" the minutes.



Further activities

The teacher should:

- Set the students a mini-research project after the discussion, ask them to read some stimulus material (a journal or newspaper article, for example), or watch a video;
- clearly explain the intended learning outcomes for the discussion, so that students are aware of its purpose. They will then be more likely to stay focused on the key skills and knowledge, and how to apply them.

List of proposed questions

Spirituality

1. *Some people declare to be “spiritual” beings but at the same time they affirm not to be believers in any god.*

- Define what you think “being spiritual” is;
- Define spirituality in your religion (if you practice any).

2. *Many important thinkers, scientists and philosophers declare to be religious people.*

- Think to some of them and Define in which terms their spirituality influenced their way of thinking;
- Define and present your personal thoughts about how spirituality determines and influences your personal life.

3. *Many people living in different religious contexts declare to have no forms of spirituality.*

- Define what is this philosophic condition and if in your opinion is possible to not to have any spiritual feeling;
- If you affirm to be a “not a spiritual “ person, define your personal condition.

For Younger students:

- Define what spirituality is;



- Describe what you know about the concept of spirituality in your religion.

History and Organisation of religions

4. *In all the cultural and historical context religions are strictly related with the evolution of the historical process*

- Define and discuss how the creation of your actual social and political situation is historically determined by the influence of religions;
- If your religion is not the most practiced in the Country where you live Define the historical meaning of the presence of your religion and the process that lead to the actual situation.

5. *The process of creation of a religion feeling is influenced by the presence of Religious institutions (Churches, Sects, Cults and others)*

- Describe these Institutions in your country;
- Are you in direct contact with some of them? Define your experience and the impression you have about its organization and actions.

6. *In general, a religion is defined by the following elements:*

- Beliefs (to be sure of the existences of the religion declared word);
- Rituals (formal ceremonies);
- Church (a public divine worship).

- Define the three aspects in your experiences (even though you are not a believer);
- Define how the religion you practise/d is organised in your country;
- Define how was the traditional religion rituals you practise(d) with your family when you were a child (if any) or what you herd by your friends.

For Younger students:

- Define what is a Church
- Describe what you know about the organisation of the Church in your religion



Religious Practices

The religious practice is a participation in religion ceremonies addressed to create a sense of peace of mind or to obtain comfort. In some cases the religious practices are connected with violence and extreme feelings. In the past and partially in some societies even now people believe in ancestral spirits or practice animism believing that nature is influenced by a spiritual power. Other religions believe in a single God (monotheism), other are polytheistic (Hinduism) and other are related to the non-material essence of the life (Buddhism). All these religious expressions are contact with some specific practices and rituals.

- What are the main practices in your religion? Explain what is your feeling when you take part to rituals;
- Explain and define the process of rituals that accompany the life of a person in your religion, in particular: initiation, religious education, weddings and unions, death;
- Explain if in your opinion there are rituals that you consider linked to the old tradition but not very actual in the modern times and explain why;
- Some rituals were imposed by the new conquerors, and sometime the local populations kept some ancient traditions, mixing them with the new imposed religions. This phenomenon is known as “syncretism” . Do you know some examples of this process? Study and research some cases and discuss them with the mates.

For Younger students:

- Define what is the rite you like more and why
- Do you know something about the origin of your religion? Discuss it with the mates

Theology

Theology is the study of religious faith, practice, and experience; especially the study of God and of God's relation to the world. Theology is philosophically oriented discipline of religious speculation and apologetics that is traditionally restricted, because of its origins and format, to Christianity but that may also encompass, because of its themes, other religions, including



especially Islam and Judaism. The themes of theology include God, humanity, the world, salvation, and eschatology (the study of last times).

The subject matter of the discipline is treated in a number of other articles. For a survey of systematic interpretations of the divine or sacred, see agnosticism; atheism; deism; dualism; monotheism; nature worship; pantheism; polytheism; theism; and totemism. For a survey of major theological concerns within particular religions, see doctrine and dogma.(britannica.com)

- How are we like God and how are we different from God?
- Who wrote the Holy Texts (Koran, Bible and others) and Why is it important (or it is not) to learn what they say?
- How can we know if the Holy texts are true or not?
- In many religious texts Gods punish the humans in case of disrespect of the rules, but all the religions (or at least most of them) affirm that Gods love Human beings, why the punishment (at the end of the life or during it) is presented?
- Many religions assure for right people good and eternal life after the human life. Discuss your feeling and present what your belief is about;
- Why does God want us to worship? How do we worship Gods?
- If God knows what I'm thinking and what my needs are, why do I have to pray about them?
- In many religions God expects us to forgive everyone who hurts us? Why? in other Religion God wants us to react and punish who does not respect the rules. Why? Discuss with your mates your opinions and feelings.

For Younger students:

- It is important for you being a religious person?
- How you think God is helping you in your everyday life?



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LEARNING
INTERCULTURALITY
FROM RELIGION



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FONDAZIONE