

THE PEDAGOGY OF IMAGINATIVE DIALOGUES (PIMDI)

Summary:

This strategic partnership will employ the specific resources that are available within the field of art education to develop a pedagogy of imaginative dialogues. Such dialogues allow pupils/students to recognize both experientially and reflectively that values, however strongly felt, are never given, but result from an act of valuing that is shared by all.

The partnership has a threefold focus:

- 1) A new pedagogy: the pedagogy of *imaginative dialogues* (PIMDI)
- 2) A new approach: zooming in on *the act of valuing*
- 3) Tackling an underlying problem: *the paradox of democratisation*

1. Drawing on the resources available in the field of arts education, the strategic partnership will develop a new mode of education: the pedagogy of imaginative dialogues. This new pedagogy takes the (potential) tension between seemingly incompatible cultural values as a productive and engaging starting point in order to open up a dialogical space between them. The pedagogy is imaginative in the sense that it employs artistic forms and strategies, already available in the field of the arts (education), to play out the contrast between cultural values in a fruitful and non-violent manner. Once the contrasts have been properly drawn out, experimental variations will be developed in which the consequences of valuing one thing over another are explored in various settings.

2. By taking the (radical) differences between cultural values seriously without immediately trying to overcome or mediate them, the pedagogy of imaginative dialogues will allow students and pupils to get a better insight in *the process of valuing as such*, highlighting its historical and social conditions. On the one hand, this reveals a shared investment in giving value to the world around us, opening up a rich potential of possible ways of doing this. On the other, it will instil a critical attitude in participants and enable them to evaluate the mechanisms of value formations as well as the unarticulated inconsistencies and contradictions that lie therein.

3. The underlying problem thus tackled is the waning of a collective, shared system of values, which is, among other things, due to democratization. The simultaneous presence, in the public sphere, of widely divergent perspectives, has led to what could be coined as the *paradox of democratization*: stimulating diversity, democracy runs the risk of losing the common ground that allows for an interaction between perspectives. The pedagogy of imaginative dialogues aims at re-establishing such a common ground – not in terms of a shared system of values, but through a shared insight into the process of valuing as such.

Priorities

The main priority of this strategic partnership is to develop a pedagogy that allows students/pupils to get a better insight in the process of valuing as such. Our hypothesis is that on this meta-level common values can be established that are in line with the principles of unity and diversity, fostered by civic engagement and active participation.

Finding a common ground: the principles of unity and diversity

Common values do not come ready-made, but have to be established time and time again. It is our contention that students/pupils (as prospective citizens of the EU) will have a better opportunity to contribute to this continuous negotiation when they can switch between two levels of valuation:

1. the individual level of specific values (their own personal/familial/cultural values as well as those of others);
2. the meta-level of the act of valuing as such (all cultures, however diverse, have developed specific values that define what is considered to be important within that culture; what they share is the process of valuing that underlies these values and keeps them alive).

Switching from the clash on the first level to a meta-discussion on the second level will not solve the tension between the different value systems involved, but it will enable the construction of a common ground that allows for the negotiation of such tensions. Moreover, it will show students/pupils how to find the right balance between the principle of diversity (respecting differences that emerge on the first level) and the principle of unity (finding common ground on the second level). This strategic partnership will employ the resources that are available within the field of art education to develop a new pedagogy that allows students/pupils to switch between the two levels. We will call this *the Pedagogy of IMaginative DIalogues* (PIMDI).

The project engages with the following aspects of this priority:

- a) *Fostering the development of social and intercultural competences, critical thinking and media literacy*
Openness, creativity and personal responsibility are dimensions of PIMDI that will help students/pupils to develop a personal and critical attitude towards their own values and those of others. It will provide the tools for analysing the process of valuing one thing over another as well as the political rhetoric that is deeply implicated in existing regimes of values.
- b) *Participation in democratic life*
PIMDI will foster a democratic and intercultural dialogue that does not need to deny or reduce the differences between different perspectives. Instead it will open up a new shared space that allows students/pupils to recognize others as irreducible subjects whose values might differ, but who nevertheless engage in a process of valuing that is similar to their own.
- c) *Social and civic engagement*
Working specifically with the approaches from the field of art education (critical inquiry, explorative learning, and embodied performativity), PIMDI challenges students/pupils to engage in social and civic engagement by confronting the uncomfortable differences that emerge within their midst. It does so within the safety of an imaginative realm that allows these uncomfortable differences to be negotiated on the metalevel of the act of valuing as such, minimizing the potential for conflict.
- d) *Formal or non-formal learning activities*
PIMDI will be developed with the active participation of (prospective) teachers who work in both formal (schools, universities) and informal contexts (cultural institutions, festivals). In addition, we will work together with partner institutions from both contexts.
- e) *Raising awareness of and understanding the European Union context, notably as regards the common EU values, the principles of unity and diversity, as well as their social, cultural and historical heritage*
The aim of PIMDI is to raise awareness of the European Union context by providing students/pupils the imaginative tools that allow them to negotiate the principles of unity and diversity.

Description of the Project

Main objective

The main objective of this strategic partnership is to develop an innovative, interdisciplinary, and art-inspired pedagogy around three lines:

1. The partnership frames the problem of finding unity in diversity anew, analysing it in terms of the paradox of democratization.

As expressed in its motto (“*in varietate concordia*”), the EU aimed from the beginning to find unity in diversity. The motto does not express a ready-made solution, but a problem that has to be taken up as a task again and again. This strategic partnership takes this problem as a starting point and reframes it in terms of a paradox that threatens to undermine the EU from within: the more inclusive a society becomes (diversity), the harder it is to find shared values and common ideals on the basis of which that society can imagine itself as a whole (unity). We coined this the *paradox of democratization*.

2. The partnership proposes a new approach to this problem: shifting the search for a common ground from the level of values to that of the act of valuing.

This strategic partnership starts from the hypothesis that the paradox of democratization can best be addressed by shifting the focus from the level of (individual and collective) values to the meta-level of the act of valuing as such. (See section ‘A. Priorities’ for more on this).

3. This transnational partnership will allow us to develop a particular pedagogy in which this approach is made fruitful in an arts educational setting: the *Pedagogy of IMaginative Dialogues* (PIMDI).

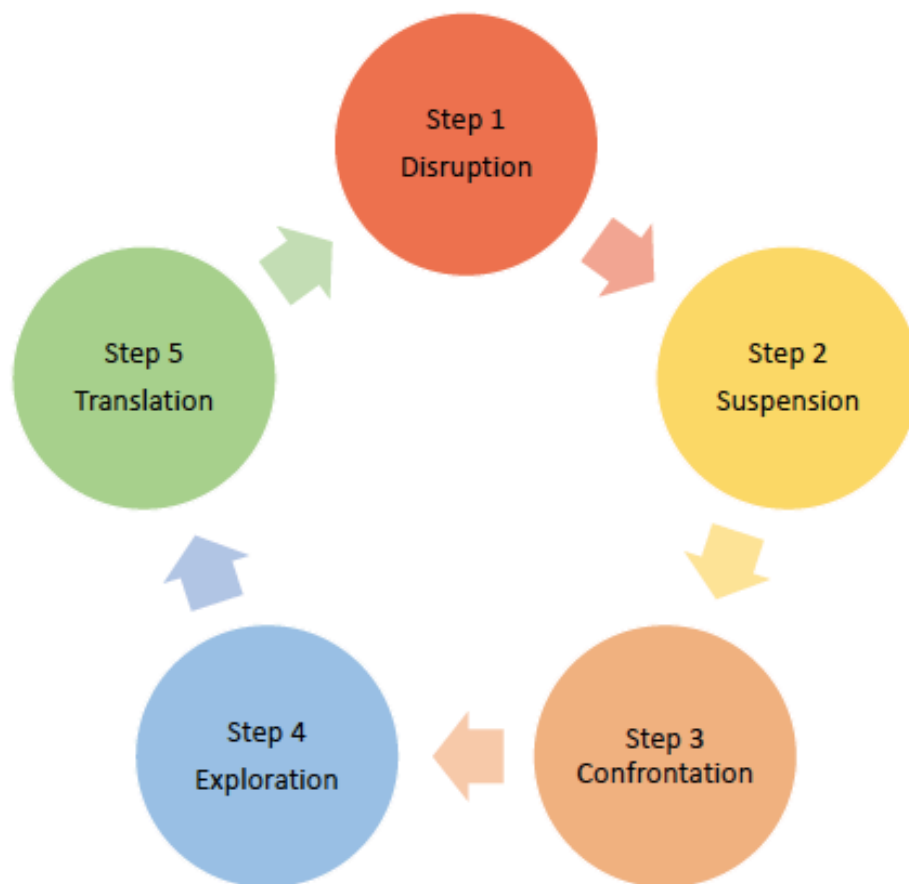
Since the arts (visual arts, performance, poetry, dance, drama, etc.) already provide a platform for exploring the tensions between incompatible values, the field of arts education is particularly well-placed for developing a new pedagogy in which the general solution (the shift from values to the act of valuing) can be made operative. By combining our expertise on the artistic forms and strategies that are available in contemporary art forms – such as relational art, socially engaged art, post-dramatic theatre, and immersive music – PIMDI will stage a playful and productive clash between contrasting values. PIMDI will use the incompatible differences between value systems to make students aware of the *process of valuing* as such, highlighting its underlying structure, as well as its historical and social conditions. In order to develop this pedagogy, we have set up some initial parameters: the ‘cycle of the imaginative dialogue’.

The cycle of the pedagogy of imaginative dialogue (PIMDI)

The pedagogy of imaginative dialogues is derived from already existing practices within the field of art (education). By linking these practices together in a new way, this new pedagogy aims to explore a set of uncomfortable differences outside of their (potentially) tense context. In order to ensure that the pedagogy of the imaginative dialogue can be tested out, refined, and further developed through actual practice, we have established an experimental cycle that consists of five steps. This cycle will be repeated three times by three different groups of participants. In all cases, the imaginative dialogue will be the result of a democratic process that is initiated by the group of participants itself. This will take place in two stages:

- i. **an experiential stage** in which participants experience the pedagogy of the imaginative dialogue on the basis of a series of exercises that have been developed beforehand.
- ii. **an experimental phase** in which participants will contribute to the development of the pedagogy by trying out several new variations. The results of this experimental phase will be used in the short-term staff meeting to develop exercises that will be used for setting up the first experiential stage in the next intensive week.

The aim of the Erasmus+ Strategic partnership is to develop the cycle of the imaginative dialogue into an actual pedagogical model. At this initial stage, we have identified five steps, each of which will be explored in greater detail and made more concrete during the project.



Let us briefly go over these five steps:

Step 1: Disruption.

The aim of the first step is to disrupt the ordinary reality of the participants by defamiliarizing it. In order to tease out the uncomfortable differences that exists within the group, the level of defamiliarization will slowly but steadily be increased. The procedure of disruption will be inspired by the local context in which the imaginative dialogue takes place. The aim is to identify uncomfortable differences that are worthwhile further exploration.

Step 2: Suspension

In order to make the pedagogy work, we first have to ensure that the ordinary reality in which the participants are imbedded is temporarily suspended. In this way, an imaginative realm is opened up in which an uncomfortable difference (as seen from the perspective of the participants in question) can be explored, while limiting the negatives consequences of this tension that would normally manifest itself among the participants. This act of suspension might be hard to accomplish at first. For that reason, it needs to be practiced a few times. Procedures of suspension include displacement, limitation, fictionalization.

Step 3: Confrontation

Seeking a confrontation with differences within the ordinary context can easily become uncomfortable or threatening. The imaginary realm – which is strongly framed as a creative and playful space - in which this exercise takes place ensures that the threatening effects of these differences are weakened to such an extent that all participants can relate to them in a free and open way, while still enacting a confrontation in which the uncomfortable differences come into focus.

Step 4: Exploration

Within the imaginary realm of the dialogue, the confrontation can now be made fruitful, by further exploring the uncomfortable difference, identifying the tensions and their backgrounds. The arts offer multi-sensory forms of perception to make the tensions audible, visible and therefore suitable for research.

Step 5: Translation

In this step the results of the imaginative dialogue will be translated to the ordinary context of the participants. The experience of the difference between the imaginary and the real realm opens up a space for new perspectives on existing values.