**IEREST**

**Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers**

**Module 2 - Activity 3**

**Experiencing (interculturality through) volunteering**

1. **Introduction**

This activity offers Erasmus students the opportunity to obtain intercultural experience in a volunteering organisation in the host society. The students engage in intercultural dialogue with the local population and develop communication capabilities in potentially multiple languages and contexts. Also, volunteering increases social and job skills, which may considerably enhance students’ employability. Thus students gain experience of intercultural communication in the workplace. This activity engages Erasmus students in critical intercultural reflection through journal writing and practical fieldwork in an organisation.

Important: this activity requires teachers to arrange a visit from a speaker from a volunteering association during *Task 2*, as well as establishing contacts with local volunteering organisations. This may take some time.

The estimated overall time for completing the activity is 10 hours.

1. **Learning objectives and outcomes**

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|  | **Learning objectives**  This activity aims to enable students to: | **Learning outcomes**  Learners will be able to: |
| **1** | Reflect on each person’s uniqueness but also similarities, and on the fact that difference is not necessarily negative and that sameness in not necessarily positive either. | Recognise and explain the variety and complexity that exist among individuals in social groups. |
| **2** | Understand how different types of identities (gender, age, racial, ethnic, national, geographical, historical, linguistic, etc.) impact on communication with others. | Be able to explain ways in which different types of identities (gender, age, racial, ethnic, national, geographical, historical, linguistic, etc.) impact on communication with others. |
| **4** | Explore and reflect on their emotional reactions (positive or negative) towards living abroad, going beyond easy attributions of their emotional states to cultural differences. | Analyse and describe their own emotional states and reactions and assign reasons to them beyond easy attributions to cultural differences. |
| **5** | Develop curiosity towards and further knowledge about the new environment and the people who inhabit it. | Demonstrate willingness to engage with the local environment and the people who inhabit it. |
| **6** | Examine how using another language can affect one’s self-image (and capacity to project an image) and feeling of belonging. | Interpret how their capabilities in using another language affects their self-image (and their capacity to project it), as well as their feelings of belonging. |

1. **Overview and description of tasks**

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| ***Task 1*.**  **Let’s talk about volunteering** | * Divide students in small groups and asks them to discuss their views and/or experience of volunteering. Ask students to take notes on various benefits of volunteering. * Record students’ conclusions in a table on the board. * Divide students in pairs. Ask students to read and compare the two texts. * Discuss findings in plenary. |
| ***Task 2*.**  **What would I be good at?** | * Invite a volunteering organizer to give a presentation. * Give examples of volunteering practices (*Attachment 1*). * Organize a *Skills walk* to help students to reflect on their own skills as possible future volunteers and identify the target organisation. * Ask students to identify the most suitable volunteering organisation. |
| ***Task 3*.**  **Getting ready for volunteering** | * Ask students to role-play a placement interview with a volunteering organisation (*Attachment 2*). * Introduce students to the idea of a reflective journal and ask them to write an entry after each experience (*Attachment 3*). |
| **Field experience(s)** | |
| ***Task 4*.**  **Discussing the volunteering experience** | * Facilitate a class discussion about the volunteering experience. * Offer two examples of critical incidents related to volunteering (see *Attachment 4*). * Ask students to write about any critical incidents they experienced during their volunteering session(s). * Ask students to report on their critical incidents and their overall experience in plenary, also referring to the entries in their journals. * Ask students to self-assess their learning (*Attachment 5*). |

***Task 1. Let’s talk about volunteering***

Time required: 2 hours

*Task overview:* *In this task, the students are asked to discuss previous experiences of volunteering, reflecting on and discussing the benefits of taking part in this type of activity.*

1. Divide the students into groups of 3 and ask them to share their experiences and/or those of others in relation to volunteering. The following questions may be used as prompts:

* Have you ever taken part in a volunteering experience? If so, when? With what organisation? How long did the experience last? If not, would you consider doing any volunteering? With what kind of organisation?
* If you did some volunteering in the past, do you feel you learned anything? If so, what?
* Would you recommend this experience to others? Why?
* What are the benefits of volunteering in your view?

1. Draw a table on the board, under the heading “Benefits of Volunteering”. Divide it into three columns, one for “Personal Benefits”, one “for Social Benefits”, and one for “Professional Benefits”. In plenary, ask the students to summarise the ideas discussed in their group, and complete the table with their input.
2. Divide the students into pairs. Give each of the students in each pair a printout of one of the two texts below:

* Text A: “Benefit of volunteering”, <http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/resources/how-to-guides/volunteer/doc/benefits-of-volunteering.html>.
* Test B: “Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits: Helping Yourself While Helping Others”, <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>).

Give the students 15-20 minutes to read through their text and find similarities and differences with the benefits suggested by the students themselves. Are there any benefits mentioned in the texts that the students hadn’t considered or vice-versa?

1. Allow a further 20-30 minutes for a whole-class discussion and comparison between the two texts. Ensure that the main benefits are discussed, namely:

* Gaining work experience for employability later.
* Getting to know people outside of the Erasmus and student community by gaining access to members of the wider society.
* Gaining opportunities to acquire experiences beyond student academic, social, and cultural life.

***Task 2. What would I be good at?***

Time required: 3 hours

*Task overview*: *This task is designed to help set up the students’ volunteering experiences, first by inviting a speaker from a volunteer agency to discuss practical issues concerning volunteering with the class, and second, by asking students to consider their skills and future benefits.*

1. Before the class, invite a speaker from one of the volunteering organisations in your community to give a brief talk to the class. The speaker may address reasons for volunteering, practical issues students might want to consider (e.g., how to approach potential organisations, what is expected and should not be expected). Leave time for questions and answers session and/or discussion.
2. Prepare a selection of examples of local volunteering opportunities, e.g. working in a library, fundraising for a charity, etc. (see *Attachment 1* as an example in Aberdeen, Scotland). Explain to the students that they will need to choose their volunteering experience, and that it will need to include at least one placement with their chosen organization. You are advised to contact local associations in advance in order to ensure that students have a realistic overview of the kind of opportunities available locally. The *Erasmus Student Network* (ESN) organises a set of initiatives, called *Social Erasmus* (http://socialerasmus.esn.org), designed to provide volunteering opportunities for students. You may wish to get in touch with your local branch to check if they can provide both a speaker for *Task 2*, and a list of local activities for the students.
3. In order to help students choose their volunteering experience, explain that it is important to consider: (1) what the individual student would like to get out of the experience (for example, practise the target language, learn a new job-related skill or engage in a specific activity), and (2) what the individual student has to offer to the organisation, in terms of skills. Concerning the latter, at this point, a *Skill walk* will help students identify the skills they have. To do this, ask the students to stand in a line with their back against the wall (ensure there is enough space in front of the wall). As you read the list of useful skills reported below, the students who consider they possess that skill take a step forward. The aim of the activity is not to ‘win’ by walking the furthest, but for each student to remember what skills they feel they have. As you read aloud the following sentences, give students time to consider whether they think they have each particular skill and, if so, step forward. The suggested skills can also be modified/integrated with different skills you may identify as more important for the volunteering work you are proposing.

* I can express my ideas clearly and with confidence.
* I’m good at gathering facts and information in a systematic way.
* I find it easy to put forward ideas.
* I like working in a group.
* I adapt easily to different situations.
* I can understand how an organisation works from a commercial point of view.
* I’m good at problem solving.
* I’m good at getting things done and working to deadlines.
* I’m able to motivate others.
* I’m constantly looking for better ways to do things.
* I’m able to plan and organise activities.
* I enjoy working with children.
* I’m able to speak and understand other languages.
* I’m familiar with other cultures.
* I’m able to convince others about my point of view.
* I’m good with numbers (I can calculate percentages, interpret graphs and tables, use statistics).
* I have computer skills (write emails, use databases, search the Internet, design web pages, etc.).
* I pay attention to quality in my work.
* I’m open to the ideas and opinions of others.

Once the students have finished the *Skills walk*, ask them to return to their places and to write down three of their skills they consider most valuable to the volunteering organisation they are thinking of approaching. The wording can be different from the one used in the *Skills walk*. They then share their choice with the person sitting next to them, briefly explaining why they chose those three skills.

1. Ask each student to identify the most suitable volunteering organisation for them.

***Task 3. Getting ready for volunteering***

Time required: 2 hours

*Task overview:**This task prepares students for their first contact with a volunteering organisation by getting them to role-play the placement interview. It also introduces the student to reflective journal writing.*

1. Introduce the issue of the students approaching their chosen volunteering organisation for the first time, and ask them about their expectations. Tell them they are going to role-play that first meeting, in order to prepare for it. Divide the students into pairs: student A will be the volunteer, student B the placement officer. Each student is given the appropriate handout (see *Attachment 2*). Before they begin, each pair needs to decide what type of organisation and volunteering experience they are going to role-play, choosing from the list of possibilities given in *Task 2*. After the students have practised the role-play in their pairs (exchanging roles so that they can both try out being volunteers), ask one or two pairs to perform the role-play in front of the class.
2. Assign the students the following task for the next class: they have to arrange at least one visit to the selected volunteering organisation, including an interview (if required) and a first work experience. Explain to the students that they will be asked to keep a ‘reflective journal’ to help with their learning. Distribute *Attachment 3*, which explains the purpose and processes of keeping a reflective journal. Remind students to write a journal entry after their first meeting at the volunteering organisation, and again after each volunteering work experience. Stress the importance for them to bring their journal to the following classes.

***Task 4. Discussing the volunteering experience***

Time required: 3 hours

*Task overview:* *This task invites students to reflect on and share their experiences of volunteering with other Erasmus students. After reading two critical incidents related to volunteering, they write about any incidents they were involved in (or witnessed) during their placement, drawing on their journal entries. Finally, they discuss their critical incidents and their experiences in general, drawing conclusions on the merits of volunteering work for personal growth and for intercultural enhancement.*

Important: The next class will need to be arranged making sure enough time is allowed for the students to have their first volunteering experience. This may mean that you need to allow more than one week between the two classes.

1. Divide the students into small groups, and ask them to discuss their experience of volunteering, in terms of their tasks and responsibilities, but also of their emotions prior to, during and after the placement.
2. Explain briefly what critical incidents are, i.e. brief descriptions of situations in which there is a misunderstanding, a problem, or a conflict - in this case, due to possible cultural differences as well as to unusual/challenging/stressful communication conditions (see *Slides 71-73*). Give the groups the two examples of critical incidents during volunteering (*Attachment 4*), and ask them to discuss the questions provided.
3. Ask students individually to think about a critical incident that happened to them or that they witnessed during their volunteering experience, and write a brief description of what happened (give them a time limit of around 20 minutes). If they didn’t experience a critical incident, ask them to write about an important moment during their volunteering.
4. Ask them to read out their description and encourage the class to attempt to explain what happened and why, from the point of view of the two interlocutors. The students should also consider ways in which the incident could have been avoided or clarified. The following questions can be offered:

* What was interesting about each of these incidents? Do any of them have common features? Which ones?
* How do you think the student’s interlocutor might have described the instance from her/his point of view?
* What worked/didn’t work in some of these instances? What could have been done differently?
* Could anything be learned from these critical incidents (even if they didn’t happen to you)?

1. Finally, address the following questions in a discussion, asking students to make reference to the entries in their journals:

* Did you find volunteering useful as an experience? Will you continue? Why? Why not?
* Do you think you learned anything useful, and develop any transferable skills useful for a future job? How would you be able to explain to a future employer what you learned?
* Would you recommend this volunteering activity to a future Erasmus student? Why/Why not?

1. Ask the students to self-assess their learning with the support of *Attachment 5*.
2. **Assessment methods**

* Self-assessment using a form (see *Attachment 5*) provided at the end of the activity (*Task 4*).

1. **Suggested readings**

* Wilson, J., & Musick, M. (1999). The effects of volunteering on the volunteer. *Law and Contemporary Problems, 62*(4),141-168.
* Wilson, J., & Musick, M. (1997). Who cares? Toward an integrated theory of volunteer work. *American Sociological Review, 62*(5), 694-713.
* Youniss, J., Bales, S., Christmas-Best, V., Diversi, M., McLaughlin, M., & Silbereisen, R. (2002). Youth civic engagement in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 12*(1), 121-148.

1. **Materials and resources**

* A computer, access to the Internet, a projector.
* The IEREST slides.
* Five IEREST attachments:
  + *Attachment 1*: Examples of volunteering opportunities (*Task 2*).
  + *Attachment 2*: Role-play cards (*Task 3*).
  + *Attachment 3*: Guidelines for keeping the journal (*Task 3*).
  + *Attachment 4*: Examples of critical incidents related to volunteering (*Task 4*).
  + *Attachment 5*: Self-assessment grid (*Task 4*).

**Attachment 1 (*Task 2. What would I be good at?*)**

This attachment is meant for teachers and should not be distributed to the students. It shows examples of volunteering opportunities in Aberdeen, Scotland. A similar list could be drawn by each teacher for the specific context they work in.

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| **Opportunity** | **Type** | **Organisation** | **Summary** |
| Assistant Coach | Weekly | *Scottish Sports Futures* | An opportunity to be involved in a youth engagement programme either in a coach or youth worker role. |
| Befriender | Weekly | *Royal Voluntary Service* | To provide company for older people to prevent isolation. |
| Charity Shop Helper | One-off | *Cove Congregational Church* | Help shifting stock and/or helping us in the charity shop. |
| Co-op Member | Weekly | *Student Food Coop* | Shop assistant at the food coop: sell produce, place orders, manage stock. |
| Conservation Volunteer | Weekly | *Trees for Life* | Conservation volunteering in the Highlands of Scotland to help restore the ancient Caledonian Forest. |
| Crowdfunding campaigner | One-off | *Multi ethnic Aberdeen Limited* | Create a film to promote our projects on the crowdfunding websites and assist in promote this video on social platforms and in-live events. |
| Driver | Weekly | *Royal Voluntary Service* | To provide transport to older people, to get them out and about and to prevent isolation. |
| Forum Moderator | Weekly | *Footprints Connect* | Looking for volunteers to help engage over 55s with forums by sourcing interesting pieces and links on new/existing discussion threads. |
| Helpers for various activities | One-off | *ASPIRE North* | School visits and out of school activities. |
| International Pudding Festival - volunteer cook | One-off | *AUSA Academic Representation* | We’re looking for a delightful array of international puddings made by our vibrant student community! Can you help? |
| Marketing officer | Weekly | *Footprints Connect* | There is be a number of marketing tasks associated with the Footprints Connect website and its members. |
| Museum Volunteers | Weekly | *The Gordon Highlanders Museum* | Voluntary positions throughout the museum. |
| Technology Tutor | Weekly | *Footprints Connect* | Teach computing, internet, digital cameras, mobile phones, etc. |

**Attachment 2 (*Task 3. Getting ready for volunteering*)**

In pairs, prepare to write and act out a role-play where student (A) will be the volunteer, and student (B) the placement officer. As a pair, first of all, decide what type of organisation and volunteering experience you are going to address. Then, practise it exchanging roles so that you can both try out being the volunteers and the placement officer.

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| **STUDENT A: the volunteer**  Today you begin your volunteering experience in an organisation. Role-play the initial meeting on arrival at reception.   * Before you begin, make a list of the skills you think you have, which may be useful to this organisation of task. * Introduce yourself, describe relevant information about past work experiences (or volunteering, if you have any). * Explain why you have come to volunteer at the organisation. * Explain what you would like to do as a volunteer for this organisation. Explain why you think you have the necessary skills. * Ask what you will be expected to do. * Close the conversation appropriately. |

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| **STUDENT B: the organisational officer**  You work in a volunteering organisation. Today, you are meeting a student who would like to volunteer at your organisation.   * Before you begin, make a list of the skills you think are necessary in order to work in your organisation. * Welcome the volunteer; introduce yourself. * Find out about the volunteer and why s/he has applied to volunteer in this organisation. * Discuss the purpose/focus of the organisation; explain the work that volunteers do; ask what the volunteer might like to do in the organisation; offer possible experiences. Find out whether the volunteer has the necessary skills. * Discuss any organisational issues about working times, institutional practices the volunteer will need to follow, and ethical matters. * Ask the volunteer if there is anything else s/he would like to know. * Close the conversation appropriately. |

**Attachment 3 (*Task 3. Getting ready for volunteering*)**

Read the following guidelines for keeping a reflective journal. Use them as a reference to write your own journal entries throughout this activity.

***What is reflective writing?***

*Reflection is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2012) as “the action or process of thinking carefully or deeply about a particular subject, typically involving influence from one's past life and experiences”. Reflection is a way of enabling self-development and deeper learning by looking back at an experience so as to learn from it and then move forward. A person may discuss learning from an experience; reflective writing takes this a stage further by putting the reflection into the more permanent and structured format of a written account and linking it to academic theory.*

***Why write reflectively?***

*Reflecting on an experience (‘Reflection on action’) can help you to make links between theory and practice and between your past and present knowledge. Reflecting on, and learning from your experiences can help you to avoid repeating mistakes and move away from acting automatically without thought: it will help you to identify the successful aspects of an experience, and any useful principles which can be applied to other situations.*

*[…]*

***Features of reflective writing***

*Describing what happened and how you felt is only a small part of reflective writing. The emphasis as you write should be on your analysis and exploration of the experience. Reflective writing differs from most academic writing in that you will use the first person (‘I’) to describe the experience and your feelings. […] Reflective writing looks to the future. You need to show how your reflection on what happened in the past will inform your future practice.*

***Getting started with reflective writing***

*Reflective writing can be more challenging than other forms of writing as it involves writing about feelings (anxieties and mistakes, as well as successes). Describing an event can help you to start writing. The next step is to then ask yourself questions about this event:*

* ***Description****. What happened? Who was there?*
* ***Interpretation/analysis****. What did I feel? Why did I respond in the way I did? What are the most important/relevant aspects? How does it link to theory? What went well/what didn’t?*
* ***Outcome/evaluation****. What have I learned? What would I change?*
* *[…]*

***Tips***

* *Try to stand back from the event and be as objective as possible. You should be as careful in your reflective writing as you would be when writing any other assignment.*
* *Be aware that your reflection on an event can change with the passage of time. As you reflect more and acquire more knowledge then your views may change. Your writing may also be affected by your emotional state at the time of your writing.*
* *Start to write as soon after the event as you can. Delaying your writing may make it difficult for you to recall exactly what happened and how you felt, so your account will not be entirely accurate.*
* *Be honest and admit to any anxieties and mistakes.*
* *Select and use only key events and moments.*
* *Use reflection as a positive that will help you to develop yourself and your skills.*

Adapted from:

Learning and Information Services, University of Wolverhampton (2012). *Guide to reflective writing*. Retrieved July 2, 2015, from <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/lib/skills-for-learning/study-guides/>.

**Attachment 4 (*Task 4. Discussing the volunteering experience*)**

In groups, read the following two examples of critical incidents related to volunteering and discuss the following questions.

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| **Critical incident 1**  Shona, a Scottish student doing her Erasmus in Italy, decided to volunteer in a middle school in a small town near the city where she was studying. The English teacher, a woman in her late 50s, had agreed to Shona coming in for one hour in three consecutive weeks, to do a ‘conversation’ lesson with her pupils. During the first lesson, for which the teacher had asked her to talk about things you could visit in London, the teacher interrupted her several times to repeat what Shona had said. The pupils seemed to enjoy the lesson. However, after class, the teacher agreed to let Shona come back the following week on the condition that she tried to “speak proper English” so that the pupils wouldn’t learn the “wrong pronunciation”. Shona was taken aback, and when she tried to explain that she was Scottish, the teacher replied “It doesn’t matter. In Italy we also have dialects. But teachers always speak in Italian, otherwise the pupils don’t learn properly”. |

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| **Critical incident 2**  Isabella, an Italian student doing her Erasmus in Scotland, volunteered to help in a home for disabled people. On the second day of volunteering, she had the evening shift, and so was asked to prepare dinner for one of the residents, Joe, who was unable to cook for himself. When it was time to prepare the dinner, she asked Joe what he wanted, and he replied he wanted some corned beef with vegetables. Isabella had never heard of ‘corned beef’, and when she looked at the tin, she wondered how she was supposed to prepare it. And the vegetables? She went into the living room and asked Joe how he wanted the beef and vegetables, and he replied “Oh, just normal”. Isabella was puzzled, but as he was watching television, she didn’t want to disturb him. She cooked the vegetables with a little oil and onion, and in a separate pan she placed the corned beef, which became a kind of sauce when heated. She therefore poured it over the vegetables and took it into the living room. Joe looked at the plate and was visibly puzzled, but he thanked her. Isabella felt really embarrassed, as what she had prepared was clearly not ‘normal’. |

* In the first incident, what are the teacher’s assumptions about the language she teaches?
* How do you think Shona felt?
* What should Shona do?
* What were Isabella’s assumptions about food? And Joe’s?
* What is ‘normal’ when it comes to food and cooking?
* What could Isabella have done?

**Attachment 5 (*Task 4. Discussing the volunteering experience*)**

This is a self-assessment grid for evaluating what you have learnt throughout this activity and how you learnt it. What do you think you have learnt to do? Taking the expected outcomes as a reference, identify both positive points in your learning, and objectives you believe you still need to reach.

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| **Outcomes** | **I have learnt…**  **I have learnt it thanks to…** | **I still have to learn… because…** |
| 1. Reflect on each person’s uniqueness but also similarities, and on the fact that difference is not necessarily negative and that sameness in not necessarily positive either. |  |  |
| 1. Understand how different types of identities (gender, age, racial, ethnic, national, geographical, historical, linguistic, etc.) impact on communication with others. |  |  |
| 1. Explore and reflect on their emotional reactions (positive or negative) towards living abroad, going beyond easy attributions of their emotional states to cultural differences. |  |  |
| 1. Develop curiosity towards and further knowledge about the new environment and the people who inhabit it. |  |  |
| 1. Examine how using another language can affect one’s self-image (and capacity to project an image) and feeling of belonging. |  |  |