

Dialogue for Everyone - Who is teaching Who?
Life Enriching Education Lab 2023, Timișoara, Romania

A look back to an outstanding experience of learning and living together, mutual education in action

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Introduction

This is an attempt to describe ways in which the values and purpose of Mutual Education were lived by the participants, trainers and organisers that co-created a community living and learning together for 5 days within the ecosystem of Babel School in Timisoara, Romania. We were a group of 40 people from 9 countries.

From conference/training to laboratory - who is teaching whom? Seeds of mutual education.

A laboratory is a space of courage, of the unexpected, of being present to what is happening in the here and now and discovering new possibilities. The idea of courage, presence with the flow of life and continuous dialogue so that each opportunity for real relevant learning is seized characterised the 5 days of learning experiences.

Getting together from different countries, backgrounds, experiences and expertise, the presence of children in and around the group revealed the huge opportunities for learning from and with each other. If only there was a framework to support all that learning, all those authentic encounters....

And the laboratory structure **was the framework** that enabled the community to live and thrive in learning.

Time for landing: the first evening was meant to break barriers to the flow of communication between all participants and an opportunity to realise the richness of the group. We greeted each other in all the languages in the room, we played and got on the same page of what to expect as routines and practicalities of the days together. The richness of the big, diverse group was matched with time and space for expression and reflection for every person also in smaller groups. Learning is such a personal experience and each one is taking the lessons one needs, therefore the sharing space was really appreciated by the participants.

Time for common grounds: Every morning we took the time to connect to our intention and get inspired from sharings from the community. It was a space to share and reveal about how life touches us in such different ways yet how we recognize each other in our humanity. It was a place for common ground. **The intention** of the laboratory was then transposed in actions as trainers offered each their own workshop on Dialogue (our common topic).

Time for choice

Choice was an important element of the learning process in the Mutual Education Lab. Choice between workshops but also within workshops. There was always a choice to work independently and take the chance to practise more or stay with the trainer and watch somebody practise in a guided way. Being able to choose empowered participants to think of their own needs and learning styles, make decisions about what suits them best and thereby accept ownership for the outcomes.

Time for enrichment - Requests and offerings - is how the learning opportunities were organised. Trainers invited participants to start taking ownership of their journey by requesting to the community what they would like to learn and also take ownership of the quality of the experience for the whole group by enriching the trainers' offering with their own offers of sharing activities, expertise, etc.

Time for harvesting - each day would end with reflections on individual learnings, celebrations and mournings so that the whole community could rejoice on the progress individuals felt they achieved or mourn together the regrets that may have appeared.

Time for the larger community - one afternoon was dedicated to encounters with parents and other teachers connected to the local community of Babel School. This time was meant to learn and share about NVC-related practices in schools, open the Mutual Education Lab inspiration to the wider world. The theme of dialogue for this event was also reflected here, an invitation to an informal dialogue about some important questions in education today. After a short set of questions and answers about NVC, there was a choice for participants from the local community to join smaller practical sessions in which participants of the Mutual Education Lab shared from their daily practices of NVC in Education.

Time for fun and informal connection - there was time included for informal connection around the meals we had together, as well as sightseeing and joining the events in the local community. Learning was happening everywhere from everyone.

Time for real world transfer - There was sharing about other NVC-related projects in Europe and about how mutual education finds roots in different parts of the world. The laboratory ended with a session of sharing a concrete step (action point) by each participant. The encouragement of the community was really powerful, enticing the enthusiasm for change starting with small steps and then reaching out to structural change.

Time for “power-with” - Participants were encouraged to come up with initiatives and solutions to challenges in the fine-tuning of the programme. The intelligence of the group had space to shine and show again and again how one mind (that of the expert) can never be as effective in finding solutions as the intelligence of a group guided towards the same purpose. And there were many instances where we could observe and be amazed by the effectiveness of truly thinking together and dialogue.

Time to wonder - There were many aha moments, realisations we had but also questions that arose and needed further exploration. Here are some conclusions from the evaluation - the aha moments totally worth sharing:

- When we are dreaming alone, it's only a dream, when we are dreaming together it becomes reality.
- You are responsible for your own words and actions, not other people's reactions
- Go with curiosity into empathic listening
- How your words land on the other person is not 100% in your control
- When your emotions build up a lot inside you and raise “above your head” you are not able to see or hear anymore arguments/messages
- School is a place where children learn to live and learn together
- Feel the feelings, they lead you to your needs
- Dialogue is an exchange between equals with an open outcome