

# INTENSIVE WEEK DIARY

DIDAR

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## Tuesday: Mpho Tutu

Today we have attended Mpho Tutu's conference. Before she started we moved the chairs to make a circle in which all of us could see each other, and we presented ourselves. It was a nice way to start because it made the situation cozier and made us feel more comfortable to ask questions or make comments

The conference started with one minute of silence where all of us had our eyes closed and were trying to relax as much as possible. She explained to us the importance of being present to ourselves in order to be present for the others. She told us the **why** of the forgiveness, and the process which we have to go through in order to achieve it. During the speech she made many references to the book she wrote with her father, and explained us the two different results of the forgiveness process, whether renewing the relationship or not. We had some time to ask questions and she explained the difference between forgetting and forgiving and the relation of the forgiveness and the truth.

After the break, we restarted with one exercise of meditation to get us integrated in the room's atmosphere, and she explained to us some facts about the educational situation of South Africa. In order to make us think about all the things that were discussed, she proposed four questions. When we had answered all of them we compared them and the conference ended.



After the end of the conference, we have met and discussed our different reflections and reached some conclusions.

When we hear about forgiveness the first thing that comes to mind is people that we didn't forgive and the conflicts that we still have in our lives. It reminded us of the saying:

- If God have Forgiven us who are we to not forgive others

It could be a bit religious but from our point of view forgiving is a sign of strength since if you are able to forgive someone that hurt you or did something bad, you are admitting that humans are imperfect and that everybody makes mistakes. The real challenge comes when you forgive and need to leave it behind, which is much more difficult, and after this comes rebuilding trust in that person. Trust is not something granted it is something earned and it needs hard work to gain someone's trust after hurting him/her.

This conference made us think about the importance of remembering what happened. Before the conference some of us thought that in order to finish with the hurt we had to forget what happened, but today we realized that if we really want to get properly through it, it is necessary to follow all the steps of the forgiving process. This means that in order to complete the first step we have to tell the entire story, so we need to remember as much as we can.

While we were speaking about these four steps, it seemed that this process is only beneficial for the victims, but we think that it can also be useful to the perpetrator. In the beginning one of us thought that it depended on the perpetrator's situation, whether he/she is regretting what he/she did or not. This was because if the perpetrator does not regret the actions deeply enough, the forgiving process might not be completely real. But we have reflected on this fact and then we all agreed that the perpetrator naturally start to regret when he/she admits publically the misdeed, because in that moment he/she will realize the harm he/she has caused, so this process can also be useful for them.

Apart from that, we reflected on our home societies, and we have seen that this forgiveness process can be very useful to try to solve some problems.

For example, in Spain there is a big tension between the Basque area and the rest of Spain because of many reasons; some Spanish people cannot stand Basque people because they think that all Basques support the terrorist group ETA, who has

murdered many innocent Spanish people just for having different ideology. On the other hand, some Basque people hate Spanish people since the police arrest young Basque people because of their support for the independence, and this erases people's freedom of thought. **The problem is that we neither can put all the Basque people in the same box because of few people's madness, nor hate all the Spanish where only some support the arrests. So we think that it is necessary to have a dialogue between these two parties to ease the tension, because continuing with these behaviors we are in one endless cycle, and nobody feels better.** So maybe the four steps of the forgiveness process could improve the situation.

But when thinking about that, one question occurred; **how can we do that?** Do we have to force people to speak? **We think that we cannot force anybody to follow these steps because it is a personal choice that needs time; it needs the commitment of everybody and should be done respectfully, with the heart.** In the end, we felt a bit confused, since we don't know how to encourage people to speak with each others to try to solve the problem. **A part of the solution could be to make schools work together, and practice intercultural dialogue. That way we could foster a unity between the separate groups within the common nation.**

While we were thinking of the Spanish situation we realized that the feelings of the victim can be different depending on how we see the perpetrators (as an individual or as a group). When we see them as a group we cannot understand the reasons behind their actions – and we surely cannot make them see why it was wrong -, **but if we see the offender as an individual we might be able to show him/her other perspectives and he can as well explain his reasons to act like he did ... and it can make the forgiving easier.**

We have also reflected on the importance of these four steps in schools. We think that it would be important to work on this forgiveness process since the pupils are still young. This way, they could learn how to handle different problematic situation from an early age and it would be useful to them in the future. But we would not teach this as a subject, **it should be incorporated in all classes in school as a method, so that pupils can realize of the importance of this process while experiencing different problems and situations.**

Finally, **we thought about our own personal conflicts.** The conference made us realize, that we still have some personal conflicts which we thought we had already solved, but actually we did not, and we can try once again with the help of these steps. Before we knew this process, when solving problems we did not know if we were doing

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it right or we had to try in another way. But now we know which steps we need to follow, so we can finish those conflicts in a healthy way.

### Wednesday: Norman Richardson, Tony Gallagher and Mpho Tutu

Today we heard Dr. Norman Richardson, Dr. Tony Gallagher and Reverend Mpho Tutu present their views on Religious Education and some overall reflections on why it is important as a subject in school, and for the general education of well working citizens.

Norman Richardson went first, starting out with focusing on walls, as the physical barrier between people, but also as a metaphor for the barriers that we constructed in our minds, as a “them and us” thinking. At this point we started to like him! He worked his way up from a practical level of the way religious education was



executed in the schools, and up to why Religious Education can be used as the key answer to the issues that Northern Ireland suffers, to break down the barriers between people. As of the case of Northern Ireland he used the two terms *bonding* and *bridging*, as two mechanisms that were important in a group, bonding was inward and bridging was outward. The bridging must come before bonding, and we see that in Shared education this is exactly what they are doing, making a bridge (as an opposite of a wall) between the two separate schools, and so they could start bonding.

The thing we reflected upon the most, was the fact that until they started the project, the religious education in primary schools was exclusively denominational and confessional. Now, as Shared education came along, they now get taught in both branches of Christianity. But the curriculum still doesn't cover any other religions at all. This is something that they should incorporate, since we have this thesis: if students realize that they can understand a Buddhist monk, and actually share values with this someone -that on the surface appears so different-, then they will feel naturally connected with someone who lives next door, and actually looks like themselves and share nationality and language with. The world citizenship education with the focus on

the fact, that we are all human, in an interlocking world. Another thing is, the Northern Ireland society must be a lot more pluralistic, than this reflects.

The same goes for Tony Gallagher, he spoke about the history of trouble in Ireland first, and had a lot of statistics on the different religious segmentations in the society. He then began promoting citizen education, understood in the way of national citizenship, and that this was needed in NI to make the society more interconnected, and to tie a national bond between the separate



groupings. This, we thought was interesting! N.I. needs a more tightly bound society with focus on national symbols, and building up this national identity therefore they need to hear about each other's different denominations. In Denmark there already is a strong national bond around the traditional symbol of 'Danishness' (in our imagined homogenous society), so here the purpose of citizenship education is to make the students understand the actual plurality of our society (and the world), to broaden the concept of Danish national identity.

Then he explained about the practice in Shared education, that the schools are seen as a network rather than a closed institution, so that it can easily interconnect with other networks. So the students had some lessons together. These are the physical surroundings that can foster a dialogue. First, you will need to meet the other. It sounds like they were inspired by the Malaysian model as Tony Gallagher mentions in his text "Key issues...", where they experiment with shared canteen and sports facilities, but separate lessons. Then Tony explained how shared education is trying to make the situation better just by improving four educational areas; using common textbooks, having religiously integrated schools, giving equal treatment to all schools and using programs to bring children together. He later spoke about the citizenship education, and the importance that it has so that students can understand other's thoughts and believes to try to create a better community.

"Leave borders where they are, but make them less important."

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Mpho chose to make the presentation a little less intriguing than the others, by simply reading a text out loud, which she didn't seem to have any personal feelings about.



### Thursday, Norman Richardson and Tony Gallagher

Today we have been working with Norman and Tony in small groups. First we stayed with Norman, and it was a really nice time. We started presenting ourselves and we talked in pairs about our own schools and backgrounds, realizing how different we are and the different experiences we have. Then we did an activity with different letters that were on the floor, and this activity also helped us to know more about each other while we reflected about ourselves in order to respond all the answers. **Through this exercise I realized how different we are despite having people of the same nationality in the room.**

After this exercises we were **divided in some groups to reflect about religious cultural differences and their influence in the relationship between people, and we realized that there were very different answers depending on the home country of each member.** It was very interesting to us because



there were very diverse answers which could connect to each other, and it allowed us to extend our knowledge and reflect on our own thoughts and ideas. **Through this exercise we also reflected on the importance of the teachers in the religion education.** It is very important to have a teacher who really wants to teach that, because **almost all the members of our group said that in our home schools the teachers of religion did not show interest in what they were teaching, and now it is very common that people do not take seriously this issue.** In order to avoid this lack of interest, it is essential to have teachers with enough knowledge in the subject and who are going to teach it in an opened and wide way. We also thought that it is necessary to teachers to not show their own opinions and believes so that pupils will not be influenced by them, but we feel it is very hard to be achieved because we cannot easily control our own emotions and ideas.

Norman later proposed one activity in which we had to find our place in one line depending the level of confidence we felt to deal with different issues, and it was a very

inspiring activity because we think it can be very useful to practice with children, in order to make them think on their own beliefs, and also to make them engage in dialogue with other students to know exactly where they have to stand in the line. **While we were doing this activity we again realized the diversity in class, and it was interesting to know our classmates better. We also noticed that depending on our nationality, we sometimes ended up having similar personal feelings about the issues, this could be linked to our educational backgrounds.** (The Spanish don't have to learn religion in school, and most of them didn't feel comfortable talking about religious conflicts with students)

Last physical exercise was similar to the one we did with the dialogue ambassadors, but here the corners was the same with all the questions; agree, disagree, not sure and I do not care. As last time you could also change place during the discussion after, but the focus was a bit different from last time, since the dialogue after was not as long, and **I think some of the students did not feel as comfortable with choosing something different from everyone else, because they did not get time enough to express their views.**

The final activity we did was to find some solutions to different school scenarios in groups, and we thought of many different ways to solve them. It was surprising because many of them were quite different to each other but they all would work fine to end with the problem.

**After the meeting the thing that we talked about was the idea of how beneficial it can be to deal with differences, because it gives us the opportunity to listen to others' opinions and it allows us to change our mind or to think again on what we think and why we think that.**

After being with Norman we have had a meeting with Tony.

The first activity was a tangled group practice, to take each other's hands in the middle of a circle, and then try to untangle the knot. This was to exemplify how much it helps talking to one another, in tangled situations.

**Then to our favorite activity of the day! Divided into groups, he presented a story, where we had all been on a cruise, but the ship sank and now we had ended up at a deserted island, there was no chance of getting away, and so we had to figure out some common rules to live together on this island.** This was very interesting, both on

- **Group dynamics**, as what your own role in the group might be

- To agree on the **basic rules of coexistence**. Which can we bring along from our normal world, and do we need all of them? What do we expect from the human nature, is it necessary to write 'no killing'?
- How to we **manage the island, with democracy?** And **how do we avoid the majority just ignoring the minorities.**
- What should we do if someone breaks the rules? **How and why do we punish?**

Then the situation changed, one was washed away from our island, and a new one arrived. The new person disagreed with our rules. Suddenly we couldn't get anything to work. **The new person in our group said that she didn't like the fact that we had a nonviolent society, which she liked to fight instead of talking.** The essential view that this woke up in the group was;

- "If you don't like our rules, you can just leave our island" (which meant drowning)
- the extremely passionate/rational convincing speech on why this fighting thing made no sense,
- And one in the group offered to fight the girl sometimes, just to get it out of her system.

**We think all three are the ones that you see when a minority meets a majority culture. We had only been working with this for 15 minutes, and still we were all completely personally engaged in "our" society. We think we can really use this in our projects**

Finally we compared all our discussions in the big group, and we reflected on how we could fill all the needs of the students. We think that it is very difficult to deal with all pupils' needs, but we think that we can try to speak about all the needs in class and try to figure out with the students which are the best ways to solve as much needs as we can, trying to adapt students to each others.

**Both were unforgettable sessions which we really did not want to end, sessions full of activities that made us eager to know more different methods to foster dialogue, and to seek more information on this topic.**