

## DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS THROUGH DIGITAL IDENTITY

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The project aims at exploring the development of intercultural identities starting from the analysis of the self sharing processes that happen within specific educational environments. In particular, we assume that the digital virtual environments can favour the sharing of meanings and cultural values and collaboration in the construction of intercultural artefacts. Recent studies have, in fact, shown that collaborative virtual environments allow both the redefinition of participants' identity, and the construction of new cultural artefacts. The ultimate scope of the project is the identification of new possible didactic methodologies that can enhance cultural exchanges through practical activities, respecting the socio-cultural dimension of identity.

With identity we intend: a) the (mediated) dialogical dimension of positioning, b) identity as role covered into the educational context (I as a student, as a teacher, as an expert, as a apprentice, as an evaluator), c) cultural (values, believes, practices, opinions), d) gender.

Moreover, this project could stimulate research about new and more complete learning assessment methods Particular reference will be kept to the formation of e-portfolio. In fact, one of the goals of this project is to enrich the e-portfolio by including also dimensions connected to digital identity and cultural awareness as fundamental moments of learning.

The virtual community that will arise from this project (teachers, students, researchers) should contribute to the development of didactical and assessment materials, concerning digital and intercultural identity.

To this project can participate classrooms from any nationality, from compulsory grades (from kindergarten to high school), to which will be proposed to build a virtual world aimed at "containing" and valorising identity aspects. For those who have no knowledge of the software used an on-line training will be offered.

Starting with a collective brainstorming, both in classrooms and in the virtual environment, goals and working strategies will be defined collaratively. Each classroom will put in practice the general goals – defined as guide-lines - in a "situated" way, keeping up with its specific needs, interests, constrains and potentialities.

For example, they could start by reading and discussing in classroom books about the considered themes ("The invisible cities", by Calvino; "The 60 tails" by Buzzati; "Il Milione" by Marco Polo, choosing the book depending upon students' skills and age). Later they could plan and build three-dimensional objects with a strong cultural value. For example, objects addressed to them selves as adults and/or to their friends as adults – as gifts; or objects representing in a meaningful way their own or some else social, cultural, religious, family values.

At the moment the following classrooms are involved:

- two classrooms from Bari (Italy) – medium expertise with technology - II and IV grade. They already had brainstorming in the classroom and a few small group discussions.
- One kindergarten classroom from Latina (Italy) - technologically advanced.

Three pieces of software are used:

1. Active Words. Is a three-dimensional world that can be downloaded from this site: [http://www.activeworlds.com/edu/awedu\\_download.asp](http://www.activeworlds.com/edu/awedu_download.asp)

The virtual world of Icity is already running (select Show -> tabs) and tourists are welcome to visit it. The University of Bari has purchased 20 citizenships and they will be distributed to the participants to the project.

Main goal of Icity is to develop a virtual community focused on building cultural objects related to identity and multicultural values.

Icity is structured along different types of building areas:

- Personal buildings: each participant can build virtual houses according to specific needs. These buildings are free and built without any guideline from the research group.
- Who am I: this is a space where each student will display material to represent who they are. These buildings are guided by the research group.
- Who I will be: this is a space where students will build their expected identity in the future. These buildings are guided by the research group.
- How the others see me: this space is devoted to the social construction of the identity. These buildings are guided by the research group.

2. Synergeia. Is a web based platform developed by a European research group <http://bscl.gmd.de/bscl2/>

Synergeia is integrated into Icity and it is meant as a space for students and teachers where to up-load and down load classroom projects, proposals, material of any type (photos, websites, documents) and where to have asynchronous communication. Synergeia is freely accessible but logins and passwords have to be required to the coordinator of the project.

3. Knowledge Forum. Is a web-based forum designed by a Canadian research group led by Scardamalia and Bereiter <http://www.knowledgeforum.com/>

This virtual space is used by teachers and research to keep a link between research aims and didactical practices.

Results gathered will allow us to:

1. better understand the processes of intercultural identity construction and the processes of "repositioning" of personal identity;
2. provide indications about teaching/learning and didactic assessment keeping up with identity and intercultural matters.