

Unit I 41: An intercultural encounter model in 11 steps

1. Summary

Intercultural encounter situations have common features. Accordingly, there are ways to succeed in an intercultural encounter situation. We propose 11 steps for this purpose.

2. Conditions and processes of intercultural encounter situations

In intercultural encounter situations, various behavioral patterns and procedures can be identified.

2.1 Intercultural sensitization

For successful behavior in intercultural encounter situations, various prerequisites must be met. One of them is the sensitization for intercultural behavior, self-reflection and relativization of one's own point of view.

A first step towards intercultural sensitization is the relativization of one's own point of view, of one's own socio-cultural continuum.

2.2 An intercultural encounter model in 11 steps

Roland Hagenbüchle (2005:93) rightly pointed out the double function of borders: On the one hand, borders have a separating effect; on the other hand, they also have a bridging function. "In contrast to the common view according to which all individual perspectives are of equal value, the knowledge of one's own cultural conditionality invites us to be open to other people and to transcend personal perspectives. Thus, the border becomes a bridge and a passage with surprising vistas of new and previously overlooked cultural possibilities. To recognize a border as such is always already to be beyond the border. Borders have ... the double function of not only closing off the outside, but also opening it up" (Hagenbüchle 2005:93).

My research in various intercultural and interreligious contexts (cf. Jäggi 1987 and 1988) has shown that in interreligious encounter situations a number of sub-steps are necessary for the encounter to be successful. These are:

In order for a process of mutual learning to build up between different religious or cultural groups, but also between individuals of different faiths, the following steps are necessary, which I have summarized elsewhere (Jäggi 2015:16/17 and Baumann/Jäggi 1991:112-116):

1. To engage in a personal contact

To let in means to let the others in. In most cases, however, the other person, the stranger, is not let in at all. Prejudice, fear and aggressiveness often form an inhibition threshold that cannot be overcome by the other person.

2. Personal conversations

Mutual prejudices, fear and aggressiveness can be put into perspective or at least temporarily put into the background by personal concern, empathy and the showing of feelings. Commonly experienced and felt everyday situations create trust and enable mutual human interest.

3. The opinions and points of view of the other person are always based on a certain personal experience and life world.

Unfamiliar and even shocking or repulsive expressions or manifestations throw one back to one's own way of thinking and help to question it. Empathizing with the other person's way of reasoning and thinking is a prerequisite for any conversation that does not exhaust itself in an argument about words or worse.

4. Tapping into the emotional world of the other person

The emotional world of strangers can best be experienced through direct contact with the personal environment of the counterpart.

5. Interest in the religious worldview of the counterpart

Experience has shown that competent representatives of the foreign religion are willing to answer honest questions. Muslims in particular are always striking in how warmly they welcome non-Muslims into their prayer rooms.

6. Allow the foreign religious worldview to have an effect on you

Participation in religious rituals, festivals and meetings gives rise to direct and personal experiences. This also challenges one's own religious convictions.

7. Experiencing the foreign spirituality

A shared spiritual experience creates a sense of trust. This is an indispensable basis for every interreligious conversation.

8. Return to one's own familiar environment and reflection on the experience

New experiences, feelings evoked by them, but also defensiveness or enthusiasm can be better understood with the help of the mind.

9. Opening oneself to newly arising questions in relation to one's own religious world view

The intellectual confrontation with the foreign opens up new truths.

10. Re-entering the faith reality of the newly found friends in the foreign religious environment

As a rule, the counterpart is interested in an honest and critical feedback, but not in a false, superficial agreement. In the best case, friendships can develop from this.

11. Describe one's own religious worldview and the feelings associated with it to the partner from the other religion

Often the other person knows our religion only from the point of view of his own tradition. This not infrequently includes a distortion of the worldview that is foreign to them. Therefore, it is necessary for believers to know their own faith and also to be able to represent it. A dialogue is only possible between two points of view. Those who do not know their own point of view - or do not have one at all - are not capable of dialogue.

The sequence of these steps may vary. But any interreligious conversation worthy of the name must include all of these steps.

Source: Jäggi 2015:16/17, slightly edited.

From this sequence of steps in the dialogue something like a common, cross-group and cross-religious learning field emerges, from which a basis for common action can emerge.

What does this mean for behavior in intercultural encounter situations? All the steps of the interreligious encounter model are also valid, mutatis mutandis, for intercultural encounter situations:

Step 1	Engage in personal contact	It takes the willingness to engage with a completely different cultural environment that may appear unpleasant or threatening.
Step 2	Personal conversation, empathy and concern	Through personal encounters and empathy as well as personal involvement, insecurities, fears, prejudices and aggression recede into the background. Through shared experiences, trust in the person of the other person develops,
Step 3	Understanding the other person's point of view	Unaccustomed, possibly shocking actions and statements on the one hand throw the actor back on himself/herself and on the other hand make it possible to understand the actions of the counterpart on his/her cultural background.
Step 4	Understanding the emotional world of the	By understanding the meaning of a certain behavior or action, it is possible

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Author: Christian J. Jäggi

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	other person	to tap into the emotional world of the other person.
Step 5	Interest in the cultural worldview of the other person	This creates or deepens an interest in the cultural worldview and environment of the counterpart. The actor/actress can be introduced to the culture of the counterpart by competent representatives of that culture.
Step 6	Allowing the foreign culture to have an effect on you	By participating in rituals or actions in the foreign cultural environment, the actor/actress allows the foreign culture to have an effect on him/her. The own culture is compared with the foreign culture and questioned as well as put into perspective.
Step 7	Experiencing the foreign culture	Through the personal experience of the foreign culture, a new quality of trust in the foreign cultural context arises, which goes deeper than the (personal) trust in the person of the counterpart (cf. step 2).
Step 8	Returning to one's own, familiar cultural environment	The feelings evoked by the new, foreign-cultural experience and the reaction to them - e.g. uncertainty, fear, defensiveness, etc. - are processed mentally and become part of one's own biography.
Step 9	Opening up to the foreign culture	Through mental, intellectual processing, a new, deepened form of understanding of the foreign context emerges, which leads to a broader openness that is not limited to the person of the counterpart.
Step 10	Immersing oneself once again in the foreign culture	The actor/actress enters the foreign cultural context again in order to deepen his/her knowledge. The counterpart or other representatives of the foreign culture help to deepen the knowledge of the foreign culture. They are usually also interested in critical but honest feedback from the actor.
Step 11	Bringing your own culture closer to the other person	One's own culture is brought closer to the counterpart: A deepened, self-critical intercultural dialogue develops.

As one can easily see, movement in intercultural situations occurs cyclically: Starting with a **personal encounter** with someone from the foreign context, there is a **phase of reflection**

and recollection of one's own cultural environment in order to then **experience the foreign context** as a whole in a further encounter. After the renewed **return to one's own environment**, a third encounter then takes place, which allows for critical queries.

One could now object that this model only works if both sides are willing to engage in dialogue. What happens if the other side refuses to engage in dialogue? A power problem arises because the side not willing to talk will try everything to maintain a situation of "non-communication". Failing that, the other side will try to at least determine the rules of the conversation or encounter. I have said elsewhere (cf. Baumann/Jäggi 1991:114) with regard to interreligious situations in which one side refuses to engage in dialogue that one can force the refusing side to engage in dialogue in a nonviolent way. In a figurative sense, this also applies to intercultural settings: if I succeed in bringing the opposing side into a situation in which it can no longer refuse to communicate, a new dynamic is created. One possibility is to involve other actors or persons of the foreign context and thus to bring my counterpart, who is not willing to talk, into a situation in which he or she can no longer prolong the dialogue.

3. Control Questions

1. Name the six steps of intercultural awareness according to Milton Bennett.
2. What are the 11 steps of the encounter model for intercultural settings?

4. Links

Institut für interreligiöse und interkulturelle Begegnung

<http://www.occurso.org/>

Institut für Friedenpädagogik: Verschiedene Themen zur Interkulturellen Begegnung und zu Konflikten

<http://www.friedenspaedagogik.de>

Ramesch - Forum interkulturelle Begegnung

<http://www.ramesch.org/index.php/impressum>

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