

# UNESCO Chair on Intercultural Competences

## Conference 2025

### Parallel Sessions

#### **Presentation 1:**

**Presenter: Professor Joanne Hughes**

**Intercultural Education in Northern Ireland**

In this presentation I explore the conceptualisation and delivery of intercultural education in Northern Ireland. As a society transitioning from conflict, which in recent years has seen an exponential increase in inward migration, I will examine the challenges faced by NI schools as they seek to integrate newcomer and minority ethnic children within an education system that has itself been shaped by historical, community, and cross-cutting social divisions. Data are drawn from a large-scale qualitative study that encompassed interviews with 62 children aged 9-15 (30 female and 32 male) and 53 parents (41 female and 12 male) from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds across the region; and interviews and focus groups with 43 stakeholders, including educators, policymakers and representatives of statutory and voluntary agencies that work with minority ethnic communities. The findings will highlight the situated realities for newcomer children and their families as they navigate the NI education system and point to intercultural pedagogy and practices adopted within schools that are variously limiting and liberating in respect of a transformative intercultural experience.

#### **Presentation 2:**

**Presenter: Abderrahman Hassi**

**Wise Leadership and Pro-Environmental Behavior: Comparison across African Nations**

Wisdom plays a crucial role in leadership. Several organizations have successfully navigated through crises or survived over centuries on account of the wisdom of their leaders. The pursuit of wisdom can oftentimes lead to organizational excellence. Wise leadership is rooted in wisdom.

Wise leaders operate in a normatively positive way by exhibiting intellectual shrewdness, moral conduct, cultivating humility and spurring action, with the objective of enabling people to contribute to the success of the individual, organization, and community.

The Wise Leadership Questionnaire [WLQ] is a 16-item scale that was devised to measure wise leadership. It is comprised of four dimensions, namely intellectual shrewdness, spurring action, moral conduct, and virtuous humility. Each dimension includes four items.

The current study aims at exploring whether wise leadership behaviors are universal by assessing if subordinates perceive wise leadership behaviors the same way across cultures; and by examining whether the role wise leadership plays in inducing subordinates' pro-environmental behavior is similar across African cultures.

**Keywords:** Wise leadership; Wise Leadership Questionnaire [WLQ]; pro-environmental behavior; Africa.

### **Presentation 3:**

**Presenter: Emnet Tadesse Woldegiorgis**

#### **Reframing Intercultural Competence in African Higher Education: Towards Critical and Contextual Approaches**

Intercultural competence (IC) has emerged as a critical learning outcome in higher education worldwide, yet its conceptualisation and implementation remain predominantly shaped by monolithic paradigms. In African contexts, there is an urgent need to reconfigure and recontextualise IC to align with the continent's socio-cultural specificities and historical trajectories. This paper interrogates the integration of intercultural competence within African higher education systems through a critical lens. Drawing on empirical literature and theoretical insights, it highlights the disjuncture between internationalization policies that promote intercultural awareness and the persistent structural limitations that inhibit meaningful intercultural engagement among students and faculty. The analysis foregrounds three interrelated arguments. First, the development of intercultural competence must extend beyond superficial cultural exchanges to engage with epistemic plurality, linguistic diversity, and historical asymmetries rooted in colonial and postcolonial legacies. Second, institutional strategies for embedding IC, such as international mobility, curriculum internationalisation, and staff training, require contextual adaptation to address local inequalities and socio-political tensions. Third, as shown in emerging practices across several African universities, fostering critical IC entails embracing culturally situated pedagogies, inclusive assessment models, and dialogical encounters across intra-African differences. Ultimately, this paper calls for a reimagining of intercultural competence in African higher education not merely as a skillset for global employability, but as a transformative praxis that cultivates ethical relationality, reflexive citizenship, and epistemic justice within and beyond the university.

### **Presentation 4:**

**Presenters: Dawit Daniel & Nidal Benali & Divinia Jithoo**

#### **Strengthening Intercultural Competence through Africa–HBCU Partnerships: Lessons from the International Visitor Leadership Programme**

This session centres on the urgent need to cultivate deeper intercultural competence across the African diaspora by forging stronger, more equitable partnerships between African universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. Drawing on the lived experiences and critical reflections of academic leaders, researchers, and program participants from Southern Africa—including South Africa, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Botswana, and Zimbabwe—the panel will analyse the impact of the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) as a catalyst for these collaborations.

Key discussion points will include:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of the IVLP in building sustainable, cross-border academic partnerships between institutions with shared histories of resilience and development, particularly within the global South–North context.
- Unlocking the potential for reciprocal knowledge exchange and capacity building that enriches both African and HBCU communities, fostering a more interconnected and empowered African diaspora.
- Critically examining power dynamics and neocolonial risks inherent in U.S.-funded educational initiatives and considering how these dynamics play out in broader global academic collaborations.
- Identifying strategies for mutual benefit and long-term sustainability in Africa–HBCU partnerships, with a focus on centering African agency and shared leadership.
- Highlighting the role of these partnerships in advancing social and epistemic justice within higher education, and their potential to reimagine futures grounded in dignity, inclusion, and

collective agency.

By situating the IVLP–HBCU experience within the broader conference theme of “Social and Epistemic Justice: Imagining Sustainable Futures through Agency,” this panel will offer actionable recommendations for rethinking and strengthening Africa–HBCU partnerships. The session aims to inspire new models of collaboration that move beyond transactional exchanges, fostering genuine intercultural competence and solidarity across the African diaspora.

### **Presentation 5:**

**Presenter: Sara Gregson**

**The Walls We Build, The Stories We Tell:**

**Intercultural Competency Through Critical Reflection**

This session explores intercultural competence among expatriates living in Africa through the lens of storytelling, Critical Whiteness Studies and postcolonial theory. I will center this work around my lived experience as a White, expatriate educator at an international school in East Africa. I will explore the dynamics of power and privilege in intercultural spaces and reflect on how understanding one’s role in larger systems can deepen critical reflection and intercultural competence in an internationalized setting. I will focus on ethical encounters and interactions in an effort to build a reflective and critical understanding of expatriate positionality in Africa. Throughout the session, I will use the metaphor of “walls,” literal, social, and psychological, to explore how separation and privilege shape the expatriate experience and influence intercultural competence. I will share stories and explore storytelling as a way of understanding the complex and sometimes disorienting ethical dilemmas that expatriates encounter. I will provide information on my experiences with live storytelling, Lee Anne Bell’s Storytelling Project Model and UNESCO Story Circles. I will use storytelling both as a methodology and a call to action for people to connect across differences and to work to build more inclusive, compassionate, and ethical communities.

### **Overview of Session:**

#### **Inside the Walls: Lived Experience of Intercultural Encounters**

This section will use a Scholarly Personal Narrative format to explore stories of intercultural experiences from my life as a White, US American, living in Rwanda. I will ground my stories in Critical Whiteness Studies and postcolonial theory. These theories will frame my analysis and critique. My stories will act as a model for how we can use storytelling as a reflective practice and contribute to complex conversations around issues of racism, imperialism, and intercultural competence.

#### **Through the Walls: Storytelling for Connection and Reflection**

In the second section, I will examine multiple ways we can use storytelling to build intercultural competence and more inclusive and just societies. I will give an overview of the Storytelling Project Model and how it can be used beyond the classroom to analyze lived experience. I will discuss narrative identity theory and how cultivating and refining a life story supports intercultural competence. I will also share experiences using UNESCO Story Circles to build connections in diverse spaces and explore how live storytelling, similar to Public Radio Exchange’s The Moth, can be used as a form of reflective practice and community building.

#### **Beyond the Walls: Toward Ethical and Inclusive Intercultural Communities**

I will conclude by suggesting ways we can begin conversations to support diverse groups in difficult conversations and how to provide space and grace for discussing complex topics in intercultural settings. I will share ideas for how we can come together as educators, researchers, and human beings to build more inclusive spaces in the African context and beyond.

## **Presentation 6:**

**Presenters: Philina Wittke & Leolyn Jackson**

### **The monoculturality of exchange between Africa and Europe**

This presentation investigates the monocultural nature of exchanges between Africa and Europe, emphasizing the historical context of colonialism and its lasting influence on development discourse. For centuries, Africa has involuntarily hosted agencies from the Global North, driven by political, economic, and cultural interests. Despite shifts in development discourse language since the 1980s, the tools and mechanisms of cooperation remain largely unchanged.

The presentation juxtaposes colonial and development discourses with intercultural communication, a field established post-World War II by Edward Hall to foster cultural exchange. Key questions include: What is exchanged? Who changes? What remains after the exchange? Historically, cultural exchanges between Africa and Europe have favoured European norms and values, marginalizing African traditions and knowledge systems, thus eroding cultural diversity and autonomy.

Currently, cultural exchanges between Africa and Europe are often facilitated under the umbrella of “intercultural dialogue” and/or “intercultural exchange,” for instance, by the Goethe-Institut or Alliance Francaise.

The presentation analyses the narratives of colonisation and development through Richard M. Emerson's social exchange theory, which elucidates power dynamics within social exchanges and can thus contribute to the understanding of intercultural communication and dialogue between Africa and Europe. Emerson posits that social behaviour results from an exchange process where individuals aim to maximize benefits and minimize costs, with reciprocity being a fundamental principle. Power dynamics play a crucial role, as power is derived from the dependence of one party on another for valued resources. Relationships are more stable and satisfying when both parties perceive the exchange as equitable. Emerson also considers the broader social networks within which exchanges occur, examining how their structure affects resource flow and power balance.

Narrative structures defined by colonialism and development inform the behaviour of the agents. Applying social exchange theory to cultural exchanges between Africa and Europe helps to understand the power dynamics and the often one-sided nature of these interactions, highlighting the need for more equitable and reciprocal exchanges.

To access the narratives of colonialism and development, the presentation will analyse development strategies for Africa by the German government and policy papers from Germany, the United States, and the European Union, through the lens of Emerson exploring power dynamics between individuals and in networks.

## **Presentation 7:**

**Presenter: Prim-Rose Makhosazane Shabane (Dudu)**

### **‘They thought we were playful at first’: Self-identifying lesbian youth of school-going age negotiating sexuality in township and rural contexts of KwaZulu-Natal**

In recent years, there has been much debate concerning homophobia. While the South African Constitution guarantees the protection of the right to sexual orientation to all citizens, for many black lesbian women and girls these rights have just been a distant reality, reflecting on paper but hardly ever enjoyed in reality. Homophobia remains rife in South Africa, particularly in schools. Such homophobia is often supported by strong patriarchal, cultural and religious values that position same-sex partnerships and identifications as sinful and wrong. Against the backdrop of research investigating homophobia in schools, using queer theory and intersectionality theory as frameworks, this paper explored the schooling experiences of 12 black self-identified lesbian youth of school-going age, in township and rural contexts of KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. In this study, data were collected by means of in-depth interviews, photovoice, diaries and group discussion. Findings suggest that the experiences of lesbian youth remain negative, largely due to discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion from home, school, church and to greater extent teachers and schoolmates, regardless of the context where the school is located.

Participants highlighted too the importance of the gradual shifts in attitudes towards same-sex sexuality, with both township and rural youth citing oppressive environments and lack of support. Within these contexts, the youth continue to struggle in claiming their sexuality openly because of the fear of cultural and social norms which expects them to 'act like normal girls'. Also, they point to the fact that their sexuality was not taken as an important aspect of their lives, but thought it was a passing phase. Suggestions for further inquiry is to locate teachers at the core of bringing about change for learners engaging in same-sex relationships and suggest re-educating teachers for better understanding of homosexuality.

Key terms: Homophobia, homosexuality, intersectionality, lesbian, same-sex sexuality, self-identifying youth, queer.

#### **Presentation 8:**

**Speakers: Chevone Slambee, Divinia Jithoo, Eva Haug & Marleen Henny**

**South-North collaboration through virtual exchange/Africanization of the curriculum through COIL/Contextualised South African concept of Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC).**

Our session will focus on sharing findings and best practices within the iKudu project gathered in the last five years.

The iKudu project has been conceptualised to develop a contextualised South African concept of Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC), which integrates Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) virtual exchanges. The concept allowed South African partner universities to become the country's leading HEIs in IoC, curriculum transformation, and COIL virtual exchanges. Curriculum decolonisation is understood as a central aspect of curriculum transformation. COIL virtual exchanges provides an alternative to physical mobility, which cannot be implemented on a broad basis in South-Africa, due to the country's socioeconomic realities. At the heart of the project is staff capacity development, as it produced a group of trained teaching staff that has access to an international and local pool of knowledge, skills, and expertise in the relevant areas.

Within the iKudu project the working groups focused on COIL coordination, development, implementation and capacity building. In the context of internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC), the focus was on decolonization of the curriculum and creating inclusive and collaborative practices.

IoC in South Africa (SA) remains largely in the developmental stage. The Erasmus+ CBHE IMPALA project (Internationalisation and Modernisation Programme for Academics, Leaders and Administrators, coordinated by the University of Antwerp 2015-2019) revealed that there is a distinct lack of capacity for IoC in South African higher education institutions (HEIs). In SA, IoC will in the near future become mandatory in terms of the Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa (South African Government Gazette No 40815 of 28 April 2017). The latest draft of this policy document stipulates that "higher education institutions must internationalise their curricula in order to provide an alternative mode of internationalisation that can overcome the limitations inherent in international mobility schemes that remain accessible to a minority of students."

Curriculum internationalisation is conceptualised in line with contemporary global, arguably Western thinking, as the "incorporation of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as into the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a programme of study" and considered in the context of internationalisation at home (I@H), which is defined as "the intentional integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments". The awaited Policy Framework directs that IoC "must not negate curriculum transformation imperatives which higher education institutions in South Africa have an obligation to fulfil". Mandatory IoC will require institutions to embark on a journey to build capacity in order to implement IoC within the context of curriculum transformation.

In our session, we will be combining the experiences and stories from the iKudu project, which can bring interesting insights under the subtheme of the conference: Intercultural tools available to the practitioner.

## **Presentation 9:**

**Presenter: Msakha Mona**

### **The Kulani Arts Project as a platform of intercultural competence**

This presentation will discuss Southern Africa's Kulani Arts Project (KAP) – an initiative that centres indigenous cultural expressive forms in tackling social issues faced by Africans. A key product of the KAP is the Echoes from the Caves Arts Festival (<https://youtu.be/sj-wez47i5E>), which takes place in the world's oldest cave system, Sudwala in Mpumalanga. This year (2025) the festival brought artists, scholars, activists, and educators from South Africa and eSwatini as part of Africa Month commemoration. Building up to the main event, youth in various communities in Mpumalanga held workshops and training sessions. The kinds of educational processes and principles emerging from these sessions is what this presentation aims to discuss. This is with the aim of exploring what can be learned from the margins, that can inform formal educational practices in ways that are culturally sensitive. Among the themes emerging from the KAP is oral literacy as a cultural competence that enables Africans to engage in epistemic processes while promoting creativity. This is an epistemic approach that is often lost to formal education.

The presentation will encompass the following aspects:

- Contextual background to the formation of the Kulani Arts Project (KAP)
- The cultural landscape in the region where the KAP is based
- Indigenous approaches to education, through artistic forms
- Intercultural exchange, ubuntu, and unity
- Working across colonially imposed borders
- Echoes from the Caves Festival: reflections on Africa Month
- Lessons to inform formal education

This presentation may be significant for cultural activists, education practitioners, and others who are concerned with the intersections of culture, education, and the arts.

## **Presentation 10:**

**Presenter: Mohamed Chtatou**

### **Aspects of university education for the culture of peace**

Culture of peace education teaches how to prevent and refute violence. It allows the individual to understand the different forms of violence, to perceive the premises in others and in oneself, to respond to them with peace reflexes, that is to say appeasement behaviors, and to recognize the signs of manipulation leading to violence and to resist it.

The aim of education in the culture of peace is peace as a norm in the broadest sense. It applies to family, school and life interactions: intercultural, interreligious and ethnic; political, geopolitical and environmental - and orients them positively. It is this standard that will govern respect for human rights.

Building peace and spreading the values of **forgiveness**, **justice** and **equality** between individuals and the components of society is not simply a noble objective. It is also a difficult process that requires a way of life based on respect for human rights, freedom and dignity, and places it above uncontrolled practices.

The role of education in achieving and consolidating peace is not limited to schools and universities, since wars are designed by human brains. It therefore requires joint action by parents, educators and teachers. This is where the importance of peace education comes into play, as it plays a vital role in changing mindsets in such a way as to help control the psychological elements that foster violence, undo preconceived judgments, reinforce dialogue and mutual

respect, and build bridges between those who are opposed.

Peace education aims to provide university students and young people with the knowledge and skills they need to promote a positive social life that will help build a culture of non-violence and social cohesion. It is a process of empowerment that aims to effect change through the development of personal skills in non-violence. Peace education adopts a multicultural approach to change communities.

University peace education has been defined as a process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavioral changes that will enable students, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural, to resolve conflicts peacefully, and to create the conditions likely to lead to peace both within an individual and between individuals and groups on a national and international scale.

We will argue in this paper that peace education pedagogy in higher education is interactive, using dialogue, deliberation and critical thinking and learning. It encourages collaboration with other cultural groups in the community. We will point out, also, that peace education university programs offer diverse content, forms, structures, skills and attitudes that address the needs of alternative perspectives.

#### **Presentation 11:**

**Presenter: Roundtable with Darla Deardorff, Precious Simba & Divinia Jithoo**  
**Exploring Intercultural Competence Together: A Roundtable Discussion.**

Let's join together in this discussion to learn from and with each other about our different perspectives on intercultural competence and how this intercultural work is done in a variety of contexts, including intersections of intercultural competence with gender, with climate, and with Peacebuilding. Co-chaired by Precious Simba and Divinia Jithoo

#### **Presentation 12:**

**Presenters: Maysa Abuzant & Abdalkarim Zawawi & Eva Haug & Alia Gilbrecht**  
**Virtual Exchange as Resistance—Palestinian Academic Agency in North-South Partnerships**

This presentation explores how a Palestinian-Dutch virtual exchange course reframes North-South academic partnerships through a justice-oriented, decolonial lens. The "From Palestine to the Netherlands: Global Challenges, Local Voices" course, co-developed by An-Najah National University and the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS), offers a compelling case study of how virtual exchange (VE) - Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) can resist extractive academic models and foreground Southern epistemologies.

Instead of approaching VE- COIL as a neutral tool, this session examines it as a pedagogical space that—when intentionally designed—can challenge entrenched power asymmetries and foster reciprocal, student-centered collaboration. Drawing on student reflections, partnership design analysis, and key informant interviews, the session will showcase how curriculum co-creation, shared facilitation, and the elevation of local realities transformed the learning experience into one of mutual agency and relational accountability.

The presentation will be interactive in format. In addition to a short overview of the project's context, design, and outcomes, participants will be invited to engage in a facilitated discussion and brainstorming session focused on how similar VE or intercultural initiatives could be adapted to their own contexts—particularly across Africa and other regions navigating epistemic injustice. Together, we will reflect on how VE and related forms of digital collaboration might be reimagined not simply as intercultural tools, but as decolonial practices rooted in solidarity, co-creation, and locally grounded knowledge.

This session aims to contribute to broader conference dialogues on building just futures by beginning from the lived realities of Global South institutions—and using them as a starting point to co-construct more ethical and equitable models of international academic engagement.

## **Presentation 13:**

**Presenter: Najib Mokhtari**

### **Living and Learning Together: The Realities of a Multicultural Campus**

University campuses are increasingly diverse, bringing together students from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds. While this diversity enriches the learning experience, it also presents real-life challenges—such as communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and feelings of exclusion. This student-centered workshop invites participants to explore the everyday realities of studying and living in a multicultural environment. Through interactive discussions, group activities, and personal reflection, participants will gain insights into how cultural differences shape academic and social life, and how they can respond with empathy, openness, and confidence.

#### **Key Discussion Areas:**

- **Cultural Encounters:** Understanding how cultural differences influence daily interactions
- **Belonging and Identity:** Exploring how students negotiate their sense of self in diverse settings
- **Communication Challenges:** Navigating language, tone, and non-verbal cues across cultures
- **Academic Collaboration:** Managing group work, participation, and expectations in multicultural classrooms
- **Building Inclusive Communities:** Identifying ways to foster respect, inclusion, and mutual support

## **Presentation 14**

**Presenter: Huba Boshoff & Helin Bäckman Kartal**

### **Learning by Listening: Practising Intercultural Competence in International Projects**

International projects bring together diverse stakeholders from varying cultural backgrounds, necessitating culturally responsive approaches for effective collaboration and sustainable outcomes. In this interactive session, the facilitators explore the principles, practices, and benefits of culturally responsive international project design and implementation. Drawing from experiences in the South Africa–Sweden University Forum (SASUF) network, which encompasses both research-focused collaborations and a dynamic student network component, as well as Erasmus+-funded projects with African universities, the session highlights how cultural awareness, inclusivity, and adaptive communication strategies can enhance stakeholder engagement, reduce conflict, and foster mutual respect.

The session will be co-facilitated by colleagues from different African university contexts, ensuring a multiplicity of perspectives and grounded experiences. Together, the facilitators will guide participants through a series of small-group conversations shaped by reflective questions, such as:

- What does intercultural competence mean in your day-to-day work?
- Can you describe a moment in an international project where cultural differences created tension or required a change in approach?
- How do you ensure that all voices, especially those often underrepresented, are heard and respected in collaborative spaces?
- How do you adapt your project approach to different local or institutional contexts, including traditional or indigenous knowledge systems?
- What's one piece of advice you would share with someone starting out in intercultural collaboration?



The session emphasizes that culturally responsive methodologies are not only ethical imperatives but also strategic tools that contribute to the long-term success and impact of international development, education, and research partnerships. By surfacing concrete examples and inviting open dialogue across African contexts, this session offers a space for shared learning and for participants to gather insights they can bring back to their own institutional and project settings.

#### **Presentation 15:**

**Presenters: Precious Simba & Darla Deardorff**

#### **Ubuntu Philosophy as a Framework for Equitable Global North – South Educational Partnerships.**

This session proposes Ubuntu, an African philosophy emphasizing communal interdependence, as a transformative lens for reimagining Global North-South partnerships in international education, with the overarching goal of enhancing intercultural competence. Persistent power imbalances in these collaborations necessitate ethical frameworks that recenter reciprocity and epistemic justice. Through an interactive session, participants will explore how Ubuntu principles can counter extractive dynamics, foster truly equitable partnerships, and develop crucial intercultural skills.

The session will be structured around three key pillars derived from Ubuntu philosophy, all contributing to intercultural competence development:

**Epistemic equity:** Recognizing and valuing Southern knowledge systems, thereby expanding participants' cultural perspectives.

**Procedural justice:** Implementing consensus-based governance models that require cross-cultural negotiation and understanding.

**Benefit redistribution:** Ensuring fair resource allocation, which demands culturally sensitive decision-making.

Drawing on case studies from sub-Saharan Africa, facilitators will demonstrate how these principles have been successfully applied to reshape collaborations, including revised PhD supervision methods and equal decision-making authority between Northern and Southern partners. These examples will highlight the practical application of intercultural competence in academic settings. The session will conclude with a collaborative session on policy implications inviting participants to contribute to a framework for adopting Ubuntu's relational ethics as a pathway to dismantle colonial legacies in global scholarship.

#### **Presentation 16:**

**Presenters: Jennice McCafferty, Amber Howard, Fatima Drifi, Kiara Tendeu Oloruko, Lesley Nchabeleng**

#### **Panel: Mainstreaming Virtual Exchange from Policy Vision to Educational Impact**

This panel brings together education leaders, teacher educators, and former exchange participants from Morocco, South Africa, Tanzania, and the United States to explore how Virtual Exchange (VE) is being mainstreamed as a strategy for advancing global learning, civic engagement, and education for sustainable development. With perspectives spanning government policy, teacher training institutions, and community initiatives, the panel will examine how VE is being used to teach for both local engagement and global understanding.

Panelists will explore VE in policy goals, including the growing role of VE in teacher education, curriculum reform, and education initiatives. The conversation will feature personal stories from former exchange participants and educators whose practice has been transformed by VE, offering insight into the real-world impact of cross-cultural collaboration. The session will conclude with a forward-looking discussion on future trends and innovations in the field, including innovations in virtual exchange for socioenvironmental learning that are being implemented in a South African education initiative and how Maasai educators are using VE to develop culturally sustaining pedagogies and global connections in their field.

## Panel Objectives:

This panel aims to illuminate how Virtual Exchange (VE) is being integrated into educational systems through national policy, teacher training, and grassroots initiatives. It will highlight effective support structures for VE across diverse contexts, share lived experiences from students, educators, and policymakers, and foster dialogue on the future of VE amid shifting global education priorities.

## Intended Audience:

Educators, policymakers, program directors, teacher educators, and global learning practitioners interested in cross-cultural collaboration and peace education.

## Outcomes:

Attendees will leave with a multi-level understanding of how VE is being mainstreamed—from government policy to classroom practice. They will gain insights into the practical and institutional mechanisms needed for VE to thrive, along with firsthand stories of its impact and inspiration for implementation in their own settings.

## Presentation 17:

**Presenter: Dr. Bernard Kitheka**

### **Lessons along the planetary trail: some path to global citizenship**

In a world increasingly shaped by transnational challenges—climate change, inequality, migration, and fragile livelihoods—cultural competence is more than a soft skill; it is a critical foundation for sustainable development. Drawing on over two decades of lived experience across five countries—Kenya, Malawi, Kazakhstan, South Sudan, and the United States—this presentation shares key insights from my personal and professional journey as an international volunteer, educator, and researcher in sustainable livelihoods. With three academic degrees earned across diverse cultural and educational systems, and leadership in multiple study away and research programs in Costa Rica and Jamaica, I have come to view cultural competence not merely as a framework for understanding difference, but as a dynamic tool for co-creating inclusive, resilient solutions in diverse development contexts.

This presentation explores how cultural competence evolves through sustained immersion, humility, and iterative learning. It focuses on three interlinked domains: (1) working with rural and marginalized communities to co-design sustainable livelihood strategies; (2) engaging students in experiential learning that foregrounds equity, heritage, and environmental stewardship; and (3) navigating institutional, linguistic, and political complexity in cross-cultural partnerships. Through narratives and critical reflections, I attempt to illustrate how embracing local epistemologies and power asymmetries has sharpened my ability to adapt, listen, and build trust—skills that are essential for ethical engagement in international development.

In South Sudan, for example, collaboration with community elders around sustainable agriculture underscored the importance of intergenerational knowledge and indigenous decision-making. In Kazakhstan, intercultural dialogue within a post-Soviet, multilingual setting on ecotourism development highlighted how national identity, memory, and development aspirations intersect. My experiences in Jamaica and Costa Rica, in contrast, revealed the powerful role of community-based ecotourism in sustaining both culture and ecosystems, and offered transformative learning environments for my students. Across these contexts, I learned that cultural competence must go beyond “awareness” to include shared action, mutual respect, and deep listening—particularly when working across lines of historical inequity and resource disparity.

The presentation will conclude by offering a practical framework for cultivating cultural competence among students, practitioners, and institutions engaged in sustainable development. This includes tools for reflexivity, co-creation, and conflict navigation—grounded in my fieldwork, mentorship roles, and global teaching experiences. These lessons are highly relevant to the aims of UNESCO’s 2025 conference, which seeks to strengthen intercultural understanding as a pillar of sustainable futures. My hope is that these reflections will inspire a broader dialogue about how deeply lived intercultural experiences can inform the training of future leaders, the design of global programs, and the realization of sustainable development goals that are both culturally grounded

and globally responsive.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, cultural understanding, sustainable livelihoods, SDGS, ecotourism

#### **Presentation 18:**

**Presenter: Patrice Mwepu**

#### **The Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence: Rhodes University Experience**

The Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth is pioneering a new model for African Studies based on principles of multiplicity and equal partnership. Its collaborative framework, built with African Cluster Centres at universities like Rhodes University, Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, Moi University, and the University of Lagos, ensures that research is co-created and relevant to African priorities.

Central to this collaborative framework is a steadfast commitment to advancing the African agenda. This means prioritizing research questions, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks that are generated from and resonate within African contexts.

This presentation will focus on the Cluster's role in fostering intercultural competencies, using the partnership with Rhodes University as a key example. I will analyse both the significant opportunities this collaborative paradigm presents and the practical challenges it must overcome to achieve its transformative goals.

#### **Presentation 19:**

**Presenter: Roundtable with Darla Deardorff & Youth**

#### **Youth Perspectives on Intercultural Competence: Roundtable Discussion**

Join youth in discussing together their perspectives on intercultural competence and their reflections on what they are hearing through the conference. Chaired by UNESCO Chairholder Darla K Deardorff.

#### **Presentation 20:**

**Presenters: Maysa Abuzant & Francesca Helm & Alia Gilbrecht & Abdalkarim Zawawi**

#### **Voices from Palestine and Europe: A Climate Justice Virtual Exchange Through Genocide**

This interactive presentation explores a climate justice-focused virtual exchange between students across Europe and the Middle East, implemented as part of the broader Erasmus+-funded CliVEx project. Implemented during Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza—described by the UN Special Rapporteur as genocide and scholasticide—this VE unfolded in a moment of profound crisis, revealing how students in conflict-affected areas engage in learning under siege, and how VE can serve as a space of resistance, empathy, and epistemic rebalancing.

Drawing on qualitative data from student reflections and interviews, we share how Palestinian students used dialogue to assert presence and resilience through sumud pedagogy—a decolonial educational framework rooted in steadfastness. Simultaneously, European students confronted their positionality, privilege, and historical complicity, especially as they engaged with peers navigating occupation and erasure. Together, participants interrogated how climate (in)justice is deeply entangled with colonial and geopolitical violence.

Framing the session around epistemic and existential sustainability (Bagga-Gupta, 2023), we challenge participants to consider how intercultural competence can be fostered through dialogic, justice-centered exchange.

The session will begin with a brief overview of findings and methods, followed by an interactive brainstorming segment inviting attendees to share how VE might be leveraged in their own institutions to confront injustice and center silenced voices.

Attendees will engage with two key discussion prompts:

What roles can VE play in advancing climate justice in conflict-affected regions?

How can educators navigate and mitigate geopolitical asymmetries in intercultural learning?

### **Below Sessions will be presented as Short 2h Workshops during Day 3:**

#### **Presentation 21 – Short Workshop**

**Presenters: The African Partnerships Universities Alliance**

**Intercultural Competences in Action: Advancing Unity in Diversity through Africa-to-Africa Higher Education Partnerships**

This session draws on the rich, lived experiences of academics and internationalisation practitioners from ten South African universities that are co-driving the African Partnerships Universities Alliance (APUA) project.

At its heart, the session explores how intercultural competence is not merely a theoretical aspiration but a transformative, practice-driven imperative in advancing Africa-to-Africa partnerships. The panel will foreground the practical tools, frameworks, and intentional strategies developed through the APUA project, showcasing how unity in diversity is not only possible but necessary for meaningful, decolonial, and sustainable collaboration. Drawing from site visits, academic exchanges, and cross-border engagements, panellists will share compelling narratives that highlight both commonalities and critical cultural distinctions encountered across African higher education institutions.

By positioning intercultural competences as an evolving and context-sensitive toolkit, this session invites participants to critically engage with the ways in which universities can cultivate more inclusive, reflexive, and partnership-oriented approaches to collaboration. Far from being a peripheral skill, intercultural competences emerge here as central to institutional transformation, knowledge co-creation, and the everyday enactment of Africa-centred internationalisation.

#### **Presentation 22 – Short Workshop**

**Presenters: Carey Stewart & Precious Simba**

**Layers of Us: Journaling and Collage for Intercultural Understanding and Peacebuilding**  
**Participants from diverse cultural backgrounds, peace practitioners, and educators will learn ways to immediately incorporate the use of collage and journaling to promote intercultural learning and reflection.**

Workshop Goals:

1. To develop and deepen intercultural competencies such as empathy, cultural self-awareness, and perspective-taking
2. To explore personal and cultural narratives as tools for understanding diversity
3. To foster creative expression as a path to healing, dialogue, and peacebuilding

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the workshop, participants will:

1. Reflect on their own cultural identities through guided journaling prompts
2. Learn to recognize and value cultural differences and similarities
3. Collaboratively create collage art that represents intercultural dialogue and peace
4. Share stories that promote empathy and cross-cultural connection

### **Presentation 23 – Short Workshop:**

**Presenter: Prof Kat Yassim**

#### **Intercultural Competence Through a Green Pedagogical Lens: Reimagining Education for Sustainable Futures in African Learning Spaces**

This interactive workshop explores the intersection of intercultural competence and sustainability through a green pedagogical approach, rooted in African contexts and informed by indigenous knowledge systems. It invites educators, researchers, practitioners, and youth to co-create learning experiences that are ecologically conscious, socially just, and culturally responsive. At its core, the workshop positions intercultural competence not just as a communication skill, but as a transformative tool for ethical engagement, climate justice, and inclusive development.

Green pedagogy, as used here, goes beyond environmental awareness—it encourages critical reflection, place-based learning, participatory engagement, and systems thinking. It draws from Ubuntu philosophies, indigenous ecological ethics, and community storytelling to foster intercultural dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. Participants will engage in methods that integrate sustainability with cultural sensitivity, thereby challenging dominant, extractive educational models.

This workshop is especially relevant for those working in education, development, climate advocacy, and intercultural programming. It encourages participants to reflect on their own positionalities while learning from African ecological and intercultural wisdoms. By connecting climate action, peacebuilding, and gender equity through a culturally-grounded green pedagogical lens, this session contributes to the reimagining of education as a site of intercultural healing and sustainable transformation.

### **Presentation 24 – Short Workshop**

**Presenter: Oumaima Elghazali**

#### **Intentional Teaching of Intercultural Competence in Moroccan Higher Practical Strategies**

Morocco's geographic and cultural position at the intersection of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East makes it an ideal context for exploring and teaching intercultural competence (IC). However, despite increasing efforts toward globalization and internationalization in higher education, IC remains marginal in many university programs, often limited to language classrooms and driven by individual teacher initiatives.

This hands-on workshop is tailored for practitioners and students of IC who intentionally wish to spark practical actions aimed at fostering intercultural competence in the classroom or the training environment across disciplines. After a thorough discussion on the importance of intentional teaching of IC in Moroccan/ African higher education classrooms, the workshop aims to engage attendees in a practical mini-TOT model that trains and supports educators in integrating IC competences in their classrooms, training environments or learning space.

Throughout the session, participants experience the same active, learner-centered approaches they are encouraged to apply in their work. Rather than treating IC as an add-on or a “soft” element, this workshop emphasizes its critical role in shaping globally conscious, empathetic, and adaptable learners. For those studying or practicing in the field of IC, the workshop offers both a space to reflect and a toolkit to act, starting with the rich cultural complexity that already exists within Morocco.