UNESCO Chair on Intercultural Competences

Conference 2025

Poster Sessions

Poster 1:
Presenter: Aya Anzouk
Intercultural Wisdom and Mental Health: Reclaiming Pre-Colonial African Knowledge

In this poster we will explore how mental healthcare in Pre-colonial African societies was inspired by indigenous systems of knowledge which, despite lacking empiricism, have helped people navigate their personal issues within the broader cultural context that they're a part of. In Morocco, psychiatry was heavily influenced by the Islamic conceptualization of the self (nafs), therefore laying the earliest pillars of institutional psychology from a uniquely eastern point of reference. Maristans, established in the 12th century, exemplify the innovative and distinctive nature of Islamic psychology, which emerged during a period when mental healthcare was frequently employed as an instrument of control and oppression. The therapeutic approaches employed in the Moroccan Maristans were progressive for their era, as they promoted a more humanistic and comprehensive perspective on institutional psychiatric care. Furthermore, Maristans emphasized the importance of spiritual wellness and healing, which markedly diverges from the more prevalent biochemical approach that reduces mental illness to a "chemical imbalance in the brain".

With the growing urgency of the global mental health crisis, rediscovering indigenous African psychology and incorporating methods of ancestral healing has become increasingly popular among scholars of psychology from the global south. Despite its rigorous and empirical nature, modern psychology has maintained a wide disparity between the human as a research subject, and the human as an independent entity. While the humanistic branch of psychology aims to focus on human individuality, a significant gap remains between its theories and the reality of clinical practice and application. Considering this gap, the question arises: how can we utilize ancestral knowledge about mental health and reshape it to address the needs and challenges of modern life while also employing the various tools of intercultural competence?

Perhaps our current mainstream practices in institutional psychiatry lack the humanistic component because of the deliberate elimination of indigenous knowledge from the general body of formal academic scholarship. In this poster, we will discuss the term "coloniality of knowledge", and how cultural and epistemological hegemony has contributed to the suppression of knowledge emerging from the global south. The monopoly on formal knowledge by western academia has delegitimized ethnic perspectives under the guise that they're unscientific, even going as far as questioning the feasibility of experimental research aiming to review and further develop ideas and theories derived from indigenous knowledge. Therefore, leveraging the full range of intercultural tools available to scholars is crucial to incorporating culturally responsive models on an international scale.

Keywords: Intercultural Wisdom, Coloniality of Knowledge, Epistemological Hegemony, Cultural Responsiveness, Decolonial Psychology.

Poster 2:
Presenter: Omid Aazami & Rosanne Severs
Leveraging the Benefits of African Cross-Cultural Interaction

This interactive session examines the potential benefits of African cross-cultural interaction, with an outside-in approach. We will collectively explore and identify examples of creations that came forth from African cross-cultural interactions, leading to mutual enrichment, creative collaboration, and innovative artistic expressions. Through structured dialogue and collective reflection, participants will analyze case studies of fruitful cross-cultural interactions in the African context to discover what elements have contributed to its success. Building on the forthcoming insights we aim to delineate frameworks for fostering more productive cross-cultural interactions in contemporary context.

This approach invites participants to take a step beyond the painful historical legacy that is often associated with cross-cultural interactions, without minimizing it. It is rather regarded as part of the process towards mutual flourishing.

Relevance and Significance

The ongoing global conversation about decolonization, cultural appropriation, and reparative practices makes this workshop particularly timely. By moving beyond narratives that frame (historic) cross-cultural interaction solely through the lens of trauma, this session contributes to a more nuanced understanding of cultural contact that acknowledges both historical injustices and opportunities for positive transformation. This approach aligns with current scholarly trends emphasizing agency, resilience, and creative adaptation in cross-cultural encounters.

Exploring, identifying and making explicit the mutual enrichment of cross-cultural interactions can help to rationalize the balance between what it takes and what it potentially yields. This feeds the global conversation about diversity challenges.

Learning Objectives

Participants will engage in dialogue and reflection, asking: What inspiring examples of African cross-cultural interaction do we know, in the fields of arts, fashion, language, music, gastronomy, etc? What do these examples reveal about how diverse communities can coexist, co-create, and thrive together? What are the common building blocks of these examples? How can they help us imagine a more inclusive and equitable future, also on deeper levels?

Rather than ignoring the historical pain, this session encourages us to look through it—to uncover the deeper layers of connection and enrichment that cultural encounters can offer.

Practical outcomes

We aim to translate the outcomes of this session into concrete, content-based examples to integrate into educational practices, guided by the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach. The valuable contributions shared by participants can inspire all involved educators to engage more deeply with this approach in their classrooms.

Educators are thereby equipped to view cultural diversity from a more comprehensive approach, including its positive contributions. This broadens the dominant perspective that education with an increasingly diverse audience implies increasing complexity alone, to a perspective that it also involves increasing valuable opportunities, presumably to an extent yet to discover.

Poster Session

In a poster session we would like to exhibit inspiring examples of African cross-cultural interactions from both the past and the present. This will range from music, fashion, arts, etc including the stories behind these creations. Visitors will experience these creations 'live' themselves, after which they will be invited to share examples from their own funds of knowledge.

Poster 3:
Presenters: Dr. Sandy Marshall & Dr. Abdalkarim Zawawi
Beyond Competence: COIL as a Tool for Critical Consciousness and Student Empowerment

This paper examines the role of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as a tool for critical consciousness-raising and student empowerment. Specifically, drawing on student reflections of surveys, this paper examines the outcomes of a 6-week cross-cultural virtual exchange between American and Palestinian students centered on the topic of how young people can affect change in society. For Palestinian students, this project provided an opportunity to share their lived experiences and engage in rights-based advocacy in English, using language as a tool to challenge misperceptions and reshape dominant narratives about Palestine. American students, on the other hand, found engagement with their Palestinian peers to be inspiring and eye-opening, offering them perspectives that are often missing from mainstream media portrayals. Both Palestinian and American students reported high levels of confidence in offering their own nuanced perspectives and personal experiences on Palestine and other issues. In other words, beyond helping students to develop their language abilities and communication skills, the project helped them to find their voice. Finally, both Palestinian and American students reported on the long-term friendships that emerged from this project, transforming distant others into peers and equals, thus requiring careful consideration of one's ethical obligations toward these newfound friends.

Adopting a Freirian perspective on COIL as a critical pedagogy, this research highlights the transformative potential of virtual exchange in fostering critical dialogue and perspective-taking. Likewise, this paper also draws on decolonial theory, particularly Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) concept of epistemic freedom, to explore how COIL can move beyond surface-level intercultural competence to challenge global coloniality in knowledge production, resist extractive learning practices, and center marginalized narratives in pursuit of mutual liberation. In doing so, this paper seeks to contribute to the burgeoning literature on critical COIL by expanding conceptions of global engagement beyond neoliberal ideologies of global citizenship, which often position students in the global north as globally mobile active agents of positive change, rendering people in the global south as static recipients of benevolence or pity (Chapman 2020). Critiquing the power asymmetries that frame such intercultural encounters, this research instead explores COIL as a potential site for relational, justice-oriented learning that acknowledges interconnectedness. In engaging critically with the concept of intercultural competence, this paper seeks to contribute to conversations relating to the use of COIL as a tool for promoting intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, justice, and equality in African and global south contexts.

Poster 4:
Presenters: Dr. Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler & Dr. Sandy Marshall & Dr. Waseem-Ahmed Bin-Kasim
Supporting intercultural learning through a mentoring constellation model

Internationally, mentoring relationships in higher education are recognized as a critical form of developmental support for personal and professional growth. Although mentoring has often been conceptualized as a one-to-one hierarchical model, it is well-established that individuals form complex webs or constellations of meaningful, supportive relationships in personal and professional contexts (Felten & Lambert, 2020; Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2023). In a mentoring constellation model, different mentors support a variety of mentoring functions, such as academic, career, or identity development, with no expectation that one mentor will have expertise in all areas (Vandermaas-Peeler & Moore, 2023). The number and nature of specific relationships within these mentoring constellations vary across individuals, time, and contexts, with different mentors, including faculty, staff, community members, and peers, offering varied forms of support and expertise (Allocco et al., 2022; Cruz et al., 2022, 2023).

Although there is not a universal definition of mentoring, at our undergraduate teaching-focused university we explored "mentoring for learner success" as part of an institutional self-study (Moore et al., 2024). Based on an extensive literature review and interviews and surveys with diverse

stakeholders, we developed the following definition:

Mentoring relationships are fundamentally developmental and learner-centered, and within college and university environments, specifically, mentoring relationships are distinct from other meaningful relationships in that they:

● promote academic, social, personal, identity, cultural, and/or career-focused learning and development in intentional, sustained, and integrative ways;

● evolve over time, becoming more reciprocal and mutually beneficial;

● are individualized, attending to mentees' developing strengths and shifting needs, mentors' expertise, and all members' identities; and

● function within a broader set of relationships known as a mentoring constellation.

In the recent UNESCO Chair on ICC webinar (April 30, 2025), Dr. Davinia Jithoo shared information about the UBUNTU philosophy and the ways it centers mutually beneficial collaborations through empathy and mutual respect, emphasizing the interdependence of individual and collective "flourishing." These principles align with relational mentoring approaches in which power is de-centered and reciprocity and mutuality are promoted (Thurman & Vandermaas-Peeler, forthcoming). In a recent monograph of the African Education Funding Consortium, Nicolle (2023) illuminated "the potential of transformative mentoring in Africa" (p. 1). Highlighting the need for adaptive, transformative mentoring models to support the needs of early career researchers and women to overcome systemic biases, Nicolle called for innovative and integrative models of mentoring.

In this poster presentation, we explore the potential of relational mentoring relationships within a mentoring constellation model for fostering intercultural learning and cultural humility in undergraduate teaching and learning. We aim to learn from colleagues in the African context about the intersections of mentoring, intercultural learning, and indigenous ways of knowing in their work, and exchange ideas for reciprocal partnerships.

Poster 5:
Presenter: Sameha Bouhalhoul
Good practice
Womxn: Social Justice & Social Change
A women's only module, bachelor of Social Work, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

Initiators: S. Bouhalhoul (MScs.), N. Sanches (MScs.), & F. Hanna (dr.)

With support from the NRO-Comenius grant for educational innovation, we recently launched a course aimed at empowering womxn in social work. The course was developed in direct response to the reactions of female students and alumni to the #MeToo movement, in which they shared their experiences with unsafe situations, micro-aggressions, discrimination, harassment, and misconduct in their every day lives.

In their feedback, students articulated two key needs: first, the creation of a safe space to share gender-related experiences and to develop strategies for navigating them; and second, practical training to empower womxn facing gender-based insecurity in professional contexts.

Building on prior research (e.g., Essed, 1984; Hammad, 2020; Soeterik et al., 2023), our 7-week course integrates decolonial, intersectional, and intergenerational perspectives into a hands-on approach tailored for womxn in Social Work education.

The course is structured along three themes: introspection, legacy and community. The didactics, curricula and principles are based on:

1. Embodied and Creative Practices in Social Work Formation

Future social workers engage in embodied, creative practices such as therapeutic drawing and writing to explore lived experiences and cultivate self-awareness (Singh et al., 2014). This approach disrupts dominant, theory-driven models of Social Work education by centering experiential knowledge and the body as a site of knowing — often undervalued in Western academic traditions.

2. Intersectional and Situated Knowledge

The course foregrounds intersectionality as a way to understand how systems of oppression — including gender, race, class, and religion — interlock in everyday life (Wekker, 1998). Rather than treating these identities as additive, students learn to see them as mutually constitutive, enabling a more grounded and relational form of practice attuned to the realities of marginalized communities.

3. Decolonial and Intergenerational Learning

Inspired by decolonial feminists (e.g., hooks, 2000), this course connects the struggles of past generations with contemporary movements for gender justice. Future social workers encounter counter-histories and role models whose contributions are often excluded from dominant curricula. Through a blend of creative methods and historical inquiry, the course challenges Eurocentric narratives and opens space for pluriversal ways of knowing and acting in the world.

In the poster session we would like to present the structure of the course, the approach, method and the experiences of participating students.

Poster 6:
Presenters: Timea Németh & Anna Dávidovics & Balazs Suto & Erika Marek
The Global Doctor: Fostering the Intercultural Competence of African Medical Students at a European Medical School

Introduction

At our medical school in Central Europe, African students form a significant part of the international student body, with more than 100 African students enrolled in the English-language medical program. This study aimed at examining how a multicultural classroom environment of an intercultural competence course within the medical curriculum can foster cross-cultural skills, ultimately preparing African medical students for global medical practice and patient care across diverse cultures.

Method

Conducted between 2024 and 2025, this quasi-experimental study involved a cohort of 12 African medical students. Pre- and post-intervention approach was utilized, with semi-structured interviews serving as the primary data collection instrument. The collected qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis to systematically identify and interpret key themes related to intercultural skills development.

Results

Participants reported significant personal and professional growth resulting from immersive learning within a culturally diverse, multilingual and multicultural classroom environment. Interactions with peers from varied backgrounds fostered enhanced cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and professional confidence. Furthermore, exposure to diverse cultural perspectives was perceived as crucial for developing the intercultural communication skills necessary for effective doctor-patient relationships in diverse healthcare settings, representing a long-term benefit of the class for their future medical careers in Africa and beyond.

Conclusion

This study highlights the role of intercultural competence training in shaping medical students into Global Doctors who are equipped to navigate diverse cultural contexts in their future medical

practice. Fostering intercultural skills within a multicultural educational environment supports both personal and professional development, ultimately preparing students for effective cross-cultural communication and global healthcare delivery.

Keywords: African medical students, intercultural competence, multicultural classroom, global doctor

Poster 7:
Presenter: Divinia Jithoo
Title: Justice-Oriented Intercultural Competence in Times of Conflict: Lessons from South Africa and Palestine

In an era marked by unprecedented global interconnection yet deepening polarization, the imperative for intercultural competence has never been more urgent-or more complex. This parallel session at the Conference of the UNESCO Chair on Intercultural Competence critically interrogates the limitations of conventional approaches to intercultural dialogue in contexts of acute international conflict, drawing on the intertwined histories of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement and the ongoing crisis in Palestine.

Traditional models of intercultural competence emphasize awareness, empathy, and adaptation to cultural differences, positing these as pathways to mutual understanding and peace. However, as recent events and historical parallels reveal, such models often fall short when confronted with entrenched systems of oppression, power asymmetries, and the weaponization of narratives. In situations where education itself becomes a target-exemplified by the concept of "scholasticide" in Gaza, where over 80% of schools have been damaged or destroyed-the call for dialogue and understanding risks being co-opted to maintain the status quo, or worse, to obscure realities of injustice.

This session will explore the necessity of reimagining intercultural competence as a justice-oriented practice, one that confronts the realities of power, history, and human rights. Drawing on lessons from the anti-apartheid struggle, participants will examine how solidarity-both academic and civic-played a pivotal role in dismantling apartheid in South Africa, and how similar principles can inform responses to contemporary crises, such as the systematic destruction of educational infrastructure in Palestine. The session will highlight the dangers of institutional silence and the ethical responsibilities of universities and scholars in upholding the right to education and defending marginalized voices.

Poster 8:
Presenter: Divinia Jithoo
Title: The Ubuntu framework of Leadership in Multi-National and Multi-Cultural Academic Teams: Lessons from Intra-Africa Collaborative Research Teams.

This session will present PhD research on the Structural Dynamics of Intra-African Academic Collaborative Research Team and highlight the UBUNTU Framework of Leadership in multinational and multicultural academic teams, drawing lessons from intra-Africa collaborative research initiatives. The study explored intra-Africa academic collaborations and what the leadership therefore entailed. Findings show how the African philosophy of Ubuntu can be applied to foster effective leadership and collaboration in diverse academic settings.

The research examines the structural dynamics of leadership in intra-African higher education collaborative teams, highlighting the disproportionately low partnerships within Africa compared to those with institutions outside the continent. The UBUNTU Framework addresses this gap by emphasizing principles such as collegiality, collaboration and capacity building while valuing respect, fairness, and context in leadership.

The discussion will include how the UBUNTU Framework can enhance research capacity building in Africa through collaborative team initiatives. It will explore strategies for overcoming challenges in sustaining research collaborations. The presentation will also highlight successful examples of intra-African research partnerships and their impact on knowledge production.

The session will also offer insights into fostering mutually beneficial collaborations and advancing the practical application of African knowledge systems in higher education. The webinar will conclude with recommendations for implementing the UBUNTU Framework to promote inclusive, equitable, and sustainable multinational and multicultural academic partnerships.

Poster 9:
Presenter: Dr. Amelia Dietrich
Title: Opportunities for Education Abroad in Morocco

Drawing on experiences with the Future Nobel Laureates Scholarship Program and a recent education abroad-focused convening to discuss the future of education abroad in Morocco and across North Africa, this poster will share key learnings and takeaways about how student mobility programs (both virtual and in-person) can be used as tools for understanding values across difference, building understanding and relationships in a classroom setting, and leveraging those skills for future academic and professional success. Presenters will also share collectively identified opportunities for innovation and growth in this sector.

Poster 10:
Presenters: Wastijn Bert, Verhaeghe Kaat, Vaneeckhaute Lieselotte
Title: Nicco*, a Narrative Method to Develop a Multivocal Dimension in (Intercultural) Education

Author keywords
Narratives, Shared Story, Shared Language, Teamcoaching, Collaborative learning, Voices, Multivocality, Diversity

This poster focuses on "NICCO," a narrative and collaborative method. A method that is developed through research to create a multivocal space and narrative in meeting one self and the Other (Verhaeghe & Den Haese, 2020). NICCO demonstrates how collaborative efforts fostered the creation of a common language, enabling students, educators, and coaches to engage meaningfully and equitably in the co-creation of learning experiences. By exploring the steps and methodologies involved, this presentation highlights how a shared story was built to support open communication, mutual understanding, and a stronger sense of belonging.

Within NICCO, the development of a shared story became a central part of interactions, where participants were encouraged to articulate values, define shared language, and create elements that reflected the diverse perspectives in the group. This approach allowed for deeper engagement in the process, as each participant felt more connected to the collaboration and their role in contributing to collective outcomes. The poster tries to outline the practical strategies and systemic tools used within NICCO to support this language-building process, emphasizing the importance of iterative reflection, feedback, and inclusive dialogue.

Discursive representativity concerns the representation of different perspectives or worldviews, rather than simply counting heads to determine whether the participating group is representative. The essence lies in inclusivity through the representation of interests, values, and perspectives (Cuppen, 2010).

This challenge is approached through the concept of sustainable participation, recognizing that participation is inherently tied to mechanisms of power and shaped by invisible criteria. Our social position in society is not neutral (Tschida, 2009). Democratic participation and multivocality require deliberate attention to these inherent forms of inequality and exclusion.

The poster reflects on how developing a shared story can foster social justice in education. By lowering barriers to participation and ensuring that every voice is heard, a common story can support equity and empowerment within the group, allowing diverse viewpoints to actively shape a shared space. Through this case study, the presentation illustrates how building a shared story within co-creation processes can promote inclusivity, respect, and social cohesion, ultimately contributing to a more socially just and collaborative experience.