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The Young IDEA 1st International Students Meeting 2018 (ISM) The Overwhelmed Generation: Family Developments in the Age of Globalisation¹

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The Young IDEA 1st International Students Meeting 2018 (ISM)

The Overwhelmed Generation: Family Developments in the Age of Globalisation¹

Maria Nefeli Angeloglou, Marion Küster

Abstract

In May 2018 the 1st young IDEA International Students Meeting (ISM) was held in Rostock, Germany, organised by the director of Young IDEA Prof. Marion Küster, and by students and graduates of the master's course Theatre Pedagogy of the HMT Rostock. This was the first step of a larger project lasting 2 years with the goal of organising an International Family Meeting (IFM). Noticing that in today's society people are more and more overwhelmed, being influenced by the globalised world, and that they are trying to be more open and tolerant but don't actively engage yet, we asked ourselves what result this has on today's family construction. Will children and their parents develop to be mentally and physically healthy and able to act on their own? How can we (art and theatre educators) answer those questions that we hear from the everyday experts? Through the young IDEA platform (a sub-organisation of the International Drama in Education Association) we are organising an International Family Meeting in 2020 in the city of Lomé in Togo, West Africa.

1. Introduction

In 2015 the International Drama in Education Association (IDEA) celebrated 25 years of existence. In light of this celebration, Prof. Dr. Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare of the Drama Department of the Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, wrote a statement addressed to IDEA, expressing her view that the younger generations of theatre makers should now be integrated in IDEA's work and be allowed to take the lead. She also invited everyone to turn to the theatre makers of the African continent and "allow them to resource us as we plan and work together into the future."² This was the starting point for the initiation of a project taking place on the African continent.

In October 2017 a working group of students and graduates of the post-graduate programme "Theatrepädagogik" (theatre pedagogy) was formed to realise this project. Professor Marion Küster (director of Young IDEA), inspired by Prof. Ntangaare's letter, started working on a project idea of a conference for children. The main idea was to give the children of the world a voice so that they can talk about how family life is today and what they really need to grow up in order to be mentally and physically healthy and able to act and decide on their own. The goal is to develop a format that can be used everywhere in the world, using methods of theatre and visual arts.

IDEA stands for the cultural participation of children and adolescents worldwide (within the framework of the UN children's rights), for meetings between theatre creators in education to get to know each other and exchange opinions, and also for international research in those fields. The intentions described here take place within the framework of Young IDEA. The director is part of the IDEA board, and particularly entrusted with organising activities for and with children and adolescents, as well as with young theatre practitioners. Thus, we want to develop with and for students and young practitioners a worldwide network which assists in the realisation of the IDEA objectives.

After developing the concept called “The Overwhelmed Generation: Family Developments in the Age of Globalization”, the organising team grew and started planning the first step of the project. Realising that a project on such a massive international scale would also need a massive international network of people to organise it, the 1st young IDEA ISM was held in order to create that group.

2. The meeting objectives

The objectives of the ISM were the following:

- a) To bring young theatre and art pedagogues together in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, and enable them to learn from each other’s methods and ideas;
- b) To discuss the current state of the institution of family, and how children grow up all over the world;
- c) To discuss and research how much today’s overwhelmed generation affects the lives and development of children worldwide;
- d) To create a network of artists and teachers around the world under the umbrella of Young IDEA; these people will plan and create the 1st IFM, which will research – by use of artistic methods – all the topics mentioned above, together with the everyday experts: parents and children;
- e) With those actions we hope to ignite a flame for many local, regional, national and transcultural projects to follow. There will be attempts to initiate IFMs in various locations all over the world, following this model. The outcomes of the emerging activities will be held from IDEA through social media and other platforms and will be structured to be sent as a collection of experiences and knowledge to UNESCO; the objective being to use this valuable collected material as a suggestion for possible preliminary changes.

3. Phase 1: Preparing the ISM

The preparation of the meeting lasted for 6 months. The meeting was held by the students of the second semester of the master’s programme Theatre Pedagogy. It received partial funding but was mostly based on voluntary work.

4. Phase 2: Young IDEA’s 1st ISM

4.1. ISM took place in the Hochschule für Musik und Theatre Rostock (HMT) from 12th to 27th May 2018, with 54 guests from the following institutions:

- State University Columbia, SC, USA
- Amsterdam Arts University, Netherlands
- Menntaskólinn við Hamrahlíð College Reykjavik, Iceland
- UFMG Belo Horizonte, Brasil
- Theatre educators, Taipei, Taiwan
- University of of Lomé, Togo
- Makerere University Kampala, Uganda
- Hochschule für Musik und Theatre Rostock, Germany
- Theatre de l’ Ordinaire, Lille, France

4.2. The meeting consisted of 5 parts.

- a) Input: In the first part that lasted for 3 days, a conference was held, which provided participants with input to be used in the next part. Three keynote speeches – by Prof. Dr. Bertram (Berlin) about the “Overwhelmed Generation”, Prof. Dr. Alheit (Humbolt University Berlin) about “Biographical work”, and Prof. Dr. Dotse Yigbe (University of Lomé) about “Family and Family Policy in Togo” – offered a theoretical base; afterwards, the participants had the chance to reflect on what they had heard in an artistic way, with methods of physical theatre, art therapy or creative writing. Also, 8 different workshops on the topics of biographical theatre, documentary theatre, visual arts and psychodrama were held by the invited professors and teachers.
- b) Work groups and plenary discussions: On the 4th day the participants were divided into three work groups (according to their interests: overwhelmed-ness, biography and family) to create material for the IFM in Lomé, Togo, in 2020. Every day a plenary discussion took place, where the groups presented their in-between results and further discussed the topic. For ten days the working groups met and worked on their own or with the help of a mentor from the organisational team. The groups also worked on presenting their results in a performative way on the last day.

- c) Presentation and transformation: On the last day of the meeting, the groups presented their results and ideas for organising the IFM in Togo. A great variety of material filled the rooms of the HMT, while three diverse and unique performances arose from our conceptual work. The next part consisted of the transformation of the material into a practical plan for the IFM organisation. Spheres of responsibilities and tasks were created and the participants planned their next steps within their own countries and institutions.
- d) Working with regional schools in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: The visit of students and their teachers and professors was a starting point of establishing contact with schools in Rostock and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and carrying out workshops on the topic, led by the invited teachers. Advanced vocational training for school teachers was also offered. Both endeavours were organised and funded through the regional association for theatre in education (Landesverband TIB) and were very successful.
- e) Theatre excursion in theatres in Berlin: The international group spent three days in Berlin and went to three different theatrical performances in the Deutsches Theatre, Gorki Theatre and Schaubühne Berlin. The aim was achieved – to take a closer look at artistic concepts, to be inspired, to discuss and reflect on them and, of course, to get to know the theatre scene of Berlin at the moment. With the theatrical performances and an evening together at the Gorki Theatre, the meeting ended.

5. Phase 3: Post-processing

In June 2018 the organising team gathered together to plan the next steps, process the event, gather the created material and reflect on the experience of the organisation.

The ISM has been successfully carried out with the financial support of IDEA, the AMDK (Arts Academy Rostock), the BVTS (National Association of Theatre in Education), NUE (Northern Germany Institute for Environment and Development), TIB e.V. (local association of Theatre in Education) and the HMT Rostock.

The students of the first semester master's course in Theatre Pedagogy functioned as hosts, being responsible for the food and drinks during the day. The ISM was mostly organised on a voluntary basis. The organising team, consisting of the master's course graduates who work as freelance theatre pedagogues, also worked voluntarily for the most part; their working hours for preparing and carrying out the meeting were calculated and amount up to 450 hours of work.

The organising team was also responsible for the everyday organisational matters of all kinds, along with leading workshops, mentoring the work groups and helping with the meal preparation. Although the working atmosphere was praised by all the participants, the organising team had a huge amount of work to do, which led to exhaustion. Within the remaining days, the participants got more involved in preparing the meals and helping out with cleaning.

We came to the conclusion that all of us could invest many more hours that don't come from our free time. We realised that the time spent on the search for funding could have been put in good use elsewhere.

We hope that the success of the ISM was an important step and that the personal engagement in the first phase of the project will be valued, so that potential sponsors will be convinced of the importance, the value, the results and the sustainability of the family project and will enable the next step of the concept by providing the appropriate funding.

Were the goals met?

6. The results of the ISM

- An international organising team consisting of 30 theatre makers, pedagogues, teachers, visual artists and art teachers was formed. That team will organise and carry out the IFM in Lomé, Togo.
- The main emphasis of the meeting shifted to the topic of family, and the topics of globalisation, digitalisation and overwhelmed-ness were seen as phenomena that don't need to be addressed separately, but only in the context of family.
- The main (research) question that developed is the following: "What do children and their parents (guardians) need, in order to be able to grow (with each other) being emotionally rich, healthy and able to think and act for themselves?"

6.1. Reflection on the methods and content

- The participants could give their feedback regarding their emotional state, and the quality of work and communication through questionnaires, the evaluation of which consists the research during the meeting and will be described below.

- The methods of biographical theatre and those of visual arts in the biography research clearly became the most essential and substantial tools in the process.
- It was unanimously established that the participative approach, during the preparation as well as during the meeting, is in accordance with the topic, the method and our intention to communicate and negotiate according to democratic principles. Associated with this fact are the in advance set plan and goals of the project, yet giving the participants the choice and responsibility for the methods and approaches. This approach, although it is time-consuming until consensus is reached, achieves a high degree of identification with the goals, and builds trust and motivation to reflect on oneself and be solely responsible for one's actions.
- The core group in Germany agreed to adjoin a space of possibilities and build on it a safe space for the participants to work and handle the topic in their groups, to experience and apply the aspects of social participation. The team had the role of moderating the process and structuring the results.

6.2. The research results from the questionnaires during the ISM

(Gathered by Nina Peitsch; from the 40 participants who were questioned, 15 responded to questionnaires.)

Communication and management

- Engaged and organised team, with clearly expressed aims for the whole project.
- Sometimes it was hard to express oneself in the big international groups consisting of people of different age groups and professions.
- The participants were willing to be in contact and cooperate.

Internationality

- The participants saw a lot of possibilities regarding international contacts.
- They experienced new, different perspectives and reflected a lot upon other cultural backgrounds after the exchange with people.
- They stated their belief that the concept can be developed further to include more inclusion, patience for communication and also more non-verbal communication.
- They made new friends, expanded their network, experienced new forms of communication and new methods and forms of theatre and art.
- They experienced respect and equality in the working environment of the ISM.
- The meeting was found to be predominately Eurocentric amongst the group members.

Working with different generations

- Participants saw opportunities in the different dynamics people brought with them, concerning the exchange of knowledge, experience, resources, inspiration and mutual encouragement.
- A feeling of unity was developed in the group, as well as exciting discussions and new ways of thinking and working.

The challenges of working with different generations

- The balance of the dynamics posed a problem because teachers would occupy a lot of space and talking time. People between 20-30 years old felt that they fell short on discussions.
- Developing an environment with flat hierarchy proved to be difficult.
- On their part, the teachers and professors felt that they could not participate in the way they wanted to, because of the presence of their students.

Taking part in the process

- Some participants stated that in the beginning they had difficulty in understanding the context and the goals of the whole project, and wish for a clearer wording of the goals next time.
- The transcultural work approach brought the joy of working with lots of different art forms and methods from other countries. The atmosphere of respect and equality which was created, was inviting for everybody to show their own work.
- Forms of non-verbal communication and body language made understanding easier between the participants with different mother tongues.
- Although we concluded that inclusive communication requires patience and time, on the other

hand there was the positive feedback that translation can have a decelerating effect on proceedings, something that provides more room and time to think and reflect.

Language

- Language was seen as a challenge at some points, but also as an obstacle and, at other times, as a reminder to treat each other with consideration.
- Some participants wished that English would be the only commonly spoken language of the meeting and found the time used for translation a loss of time and a tiring process.

7. Feedback concerning the topics and development of ideas

- We realised that future IFMs can take place anywhere in the world. The choice of place should not impose social ideas, but the focus should be on the meeting and the exchange possibilities for children and grown-ups of different nations and continents.
- We want to work on the growth and the stronger interconnection of the Young IDEA and IDEA network with the African continent.
- Each individual and each culture has its own understanding of what *family* means.
- The question “What is a family?” will be at the heart of the IFM. We agreed that globalisation and digitalisation shall not be discussed explicitly, but they are recognised as an omnipresent part of the world we live in and, as such, will influence our debate about family life. We want to keep the topic simple to make it attractive to families.
- During the IFM, families will be asked to share insights about their culture with the other IFM participants, and in particular their idea of family. Family celebrations and rituals should be part of this presentation. We suggest developing this presentation as a journey to this country (like we did in the schools in Rostock).
- We discussed the question of whether we should work in separate groups, where children and parents are separated, or whether we should make use of play as a successful way of family communication. In any case we intend to create a protected space through play, where children and parents can meet as equals.
- The question “What ‘scratches’ the children?” should be central, according to the participants of the ISM.
- Both children and parents should learn something that they can take to their schools at home and present it there. This will help to spread the idea of the IFM.

How to develop a concept and find appropriate methods

- Biographical methods were found to be particularly helpful in working on this topic during the ISM in the performing arts as well as in the fine arts. Biographical work gives a voice to the participants and allows them to be heard.
- Interdisciplinary work.
- There was the idea of swapping the roles of parents and children in games, to enable a change of perspective.
- It is recommended to create music together, sing and dance in order to strengthen the sense of community.
- During the ISM we developed a first schedule for the IFM, which contains repetitive structures and daily rituals. It was noted that it was helpful to keep the schedule flexible according to the needs of participants and the conditions of the place of the event.
- It was underlined several times that eating together was very important during the ISM for the purpose of connecting to each other, and we should take care of good eating conditions (food and dining room).
- Several ideas for workshops emerged. A storytelling tent, where non-verbal storytelling can also take place. Quiet rooms should be installed to prevent the participants from being overwhelmed and to enable them to rest from the intense experiences of the IFM.
- We want to create a letter-network amongst all participating countries. We will use images/pictures to communicate with each other and to prepare for the topic.
- This, the pictures and letters of this letter exchange may be presented as an exhibition during the IFM to demonstrate the pre-event networking.
- Our hosts in Togo will be entrusted with special tasks, related to the question of how the or-

ganising group in Togo wants its country to be seen during the IFM. Local logistics should be organised by the teacher and student team from Togo. Teenagers from Togo may be asked to accompany the international children and parents during their stay in Togo.

- The international working group of Young IDEA will arrive in Togo in advance to support the local group.
- Health insurance is a key aspect taken into consideration. Togo shall express its particular health concerns, which then have to be answered. There will be a doctor and a healthcare professional during the entire IFM, to ensure the continuous consideration of the participants' health and to be able to act immediately in cases of emergency. The German embassy in Togo will be asked to put us in contact with a local hospital.

8. Phase 4: Planning

The planning of the IFM started in September 2018. The central coordinating group in Germany, which consists of 10 people situated in different towns, met for a planning weekend from 12th to 14th October in Rostock. The ISM results were discussed in detail and first steps were taken to develop the next phase of the project. The topics of communication with the international group, the funding and the structuring of the IFM in Togo were the most important things to clarify on this first step.

By going through all the material that was created during the ISM, a new topic arose, as well as a new approach that will be discussed with the international departments.

9. The future network

- For the time being, the organising team situated in Germany will function as the central team of the organisation.
- 10 work departments were established, each coordinated by a member of the central team.
- The leadership of these departments will then be transferred to the ISM participants that are interested in them.
- During the reflection on the ISM work it became obvious that transcultural work requires a high level of competence in easing tension and practicing patience, to meet the needs of all the different participants with various backgrounds.
- Our work will be carried out on the basis of the methods of violence-free communication, to promote and support mutual listening to each other, describing observations, expressing feelings, needs and requests, taking decisions and expressing requests about how to work with each other.

10. The IFM in Lomé, Togo, in 2020

The Central Team suggests the following title for the IFM which will be held in Togo in February 2020 and will last for 10 days with the arrival and departure of the participants:

The power of / within Family*
*Family - What's that?
The International Family Meeting (IFM)

The University of Lomé is the partner in the realisation of the IFM. Under the organisation of Prof. Dr. Dotse Yigbe, a local organising team will be our partner from the University of Lomé, having communicated to us the interest of the university in hosting a scientific symposium or conference where terms and questions on topics like pedagogy and education will be given the main emphasis, next to the IFM.

In view of creating an atmosphere where everyone will feel welcome and accepted, we are looking for partners from all countries who wish to participate.

Notes

- 1 Young IDEA is a sub-organisation of the International Drama/Theatre in Education Association (IDEA).
- 2 Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare's IDEA Africa Statement "Sharing the future" is used here with her permission.

