



Intercultural Outdoor Recreation

Techniques for Bridging Cultural Differences While Hiking

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Context: The Intercultural Outdoor Recreation Program has been organising intercultural hikes since 2011. In 2018, we organized an interactive workshop to explore and share techniques that bring people of different backgrounds together while hiking in nature. During the workshop, there were representatives of organizations working in the outdoor sector as well as intercultural communication, and there were also several volunteers and participants of our program. During the workshop, which was held outdoors during a hike, we shared our ideas and experiences and the following is a summary of our discussions.

Key elements that promote an effective intercultural exchange:

1. Participants must be willing to share and listen, be attentive, patient, respectful and open to others.
2. Having an activity leader who will ensure adequate preparation and organization and create a good atmosphere is helpful. The leader is also responsible for indicating what to bring, how to dress, etc.
3. Ideally, let the participants be themselves and give them some freedom with regard to self-expression. They should be encouraged to introduce themselves differently than through their linguistic identity and their country of origin if they wish.
4. Encouraging participants to continue to meet outside the group is immensely helpful in truly bringing people together.
5. Make use of networks and have a wide vision in terms of who may want to participate or get involved.
6. Intercultural exchanges in nature allow us to relax and gets us out of our usual routine. It prepares us to be more open to connecting with others. Nature brings us back to our common humanity. It breaks the hierarchy created by social status, sex, skin color and country of origin and cuts us off from our cell phone and technology. When discussion topics are related to nature and the specific place, it helps us to connect with nature and represents another opportunity for learning.

Three conditions to ensure an effective intercultural exchange according to Gordon Allport, author of *Nature of prejudice* (1954)

http://faculty.washington.edu/caporaso/courses/203/readings/allport_Nature_of_prejudice.pdf:

1. Ensure that there is a feeling of equal status within the group, and no sense of a majority or minority.
2. Have a specific goal.
3. Have a leader or figure of authority to lead the activity.

A facilitator can pair participants at the beginning of the hike. During the hike, it is often more practical to discuss in pairs in order to adapt to the width of the trails. In addition, deliberately pairing participants encourages them to meet new people. It is important to ensure that participants feel free to talk to others as well and to facilitate partner changes at least once.

The facilitator can find fun ways to form groups of two.

Examples:

Form pairs according to the fauna and flora of the park in question:

The facilitator can distribute pictures or animal names of local animals and two people who receive the same animal picture or name form a pair. Discussion questions could include: What do you have in common with this animal? If you were an animal in this park, which would it be and why?

The facilitator distributes tree leaf images and the corresponding name. A participant who receives an image must find a partner who has the corresponding name.

Pictures and names of birds, etc.

Form groups of two according to the height of the participants. The shortest person could be twinned with the tallest person, the second shortest person with the second-tallest one, and so on. For an additional challenge, the facilitator could instruct participants to find their partner without speaking.

Each participant can find someone he or she does not yet know.

Each participant could be paired with someone who has a higher level of the language in question if the hike includes a language exchange.



Language Exchanges

The intercultural hike could take the form of a language exchange. The Intercultural Outdoor Recreation Program often organises French-English walks. The first half of the walk takes place entirely in French and the second half in English, or vice versa. Participants should be encouraged to make an effort to converse in the language in question, regardless of their level. We have observed participants helping each other during these outings. In addition, because these outings are both useful and enjoyable, they attract French-speaking Quebecers wishing to improve their English, English-speaking Quebecers wishing to practice their French, as well as newcomers of any status. The hikes are therefore truly intercultural. It seems easier to attract participants for intercultural hikes by including a language exchange. There also seems to be a lot of interest for French-Spanish exchanges.



Discussion Questions

In order to break the ice, we find it useful to provide a suggested (but not required) discussion topic. Often, we propose the subject at the beginning; the pairs discuss it while walking, and then we take a short break to discuss as a group. Discussion topics need to be appealing. The facilitator should strive to make participants feel welcome and feel free to express themselves, and should intervene if there is a lack of respect.

Examples of discussion questions:

1. Find two things that you have in common with your discussion partner.
2. Prepare to introduce your partner to the group in one sentence.
3. What makes you laugh?
4. What do you find moving?
5. Tell us about your favourite places to visit in Montreal. (It would be possible to form groups of two based on Montreal sites and landmarks.)
6. Share a recipe or describe your favourite traditional dish.
7. What is your favourite song?
8. Share expressions or proverbs from Quebec or elsewhere.
9. Once participants have had a chance to get to know each other, it is possible to propose all kinds of debates or discussion questions that go beyond breaking the ice.

Ice-Breaker Activities

Depending on how much time is available, facilitators could lead group games that help bring the group together. For example:

Participants get into a circle and extend their hands across the circle. Each person holds hands with a different person with each hand. Arms may cross each other. Then, the group tries to 'untangle the knot' and ideally end up in a circle.

Play rock-paper-scissors with a 'cheerleader'. Two people meet and play rock-paper-scissors. The winner goes on to play with others; the person who loses becomes the winner's cheerleader. During subsequent matches, the person who loses always joins the growing group of cheerleaders. By the end there are two people in a final battle, each with many cheerleaders.

Games can be used to help introduce each other to the group. For example, in a circle, each participant can say his or her first name, followed by an adjective that starts with the same letter, such as Fabulous Fiona.

Practical Advice to Lead a Great Hike

- Encourage participants to dress well and prepare for the weather and trail conditions.
- Plan the length and route based on the group and adjust as needed.
- Make sure everyone introduces himself or herself at the beginning.
- Keep an eye on the physical condition of the participants, especially during uphill, and take breaks as needed.
- The facilitator should count participants at the start, and wait for everyone and recount as needed at intersections.
- If the hike takes place in the evening in the dark, the facilitator can attach a small bike light to his or her backpack to be more visible.
- The facilitator should bring a small first aid kit, cell phone for emergency calls, compact emergency blanket, water and extra granola bars.

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