

# Arigatou International

## Ethics Education Framework

The ethics education framework has been at the core of the Learning to Live Together programme since its launch in 2008. This includes the key conceptual elements that provide the rationale and foundation of the manual, the values that support the foundation, and the educational approach that defines the way the Learning to Live Together is planned and implemented to ensure a high-quality, enriching interfaith and intercultural ethics education experience.

The implementation of Learning to Live Together aims to equip children to: learn to live in solidarity with people of different religions, cultures, and ethnicity; be empowered to make ethical decisions; nurture their spirituality; and to enhance their innate ability to make positive contributions to transform their communities based on values that promote respect for their own culture and beliefs and for those of others

The Ethics Education framework promotes a new and dynamic way of thinking about ethics in a global and plural society. Education about ethics is something all religions and societies can do independently; what is unique about this initiative is that it is done inter-religiously and inter-culturally. The Ethics Education Framework does not promote a new religion, but rather, acknowledges and affirms diversity. It is not a new 'teaching' but a new way of emphasizing the building of positive relationships. Its approach:

- ⚙ Is inter-cultural.
- ⚙ Is inter-religious.
- ⚙ Affirms diversity.
- ⚙ Affirms dialogue and communication within oneself and with others in an on-going process of individual and collective learning.

The key conceptual elements and values of the Learning to Live Together programme are described in the first twenty pages of the manual. The key concepts, key values, and educational approach are outlined below.

## Key Concepts

The following key concepts are central to the ethics education framework of the programme:

- ⚙ Human Dignity
- ⚙ Understanding of the Child and Child Rights
- ⚙ Ethics and Ethics Education
- ⚙ Spirituality
- ⚙ Interfaith and Intercultural Learning

## Key Values

Although not an exhaustive list, the Learning to Live Together Programme gives the following values prominence as supportive in building societies where people can learn to live together.

- ⚙ Respect
- ⚙ Empathy
- ⚙ Responsibility
- ⚙ Reconciliation

## Educational Approach

The educational approach describes the methods and required elements for designing, planning, delivering and monitoring Learning to Live Together programs to ensure quality and transformative learning experiences for children and youth.

The educational approach is built on learning opportunities and practices that allow ethical reflections which foster, above all, interconnectedness, and lead to critical thinking, the development of imagination, critical consciousness, and self-driven learning. This approach requires the development of safe learning environments, the use of participatory and collaborative learning methods, and sensitivity to the context where the programs take place.



Ultimately the approach aims to provide the opportunity for children and youth to act collectively to achieve common goals, building on their individual strengths, appreciating the diversity around them, and nurturing their spirituality. This educational approach demands facilitators who are aware of the influence of their actions, behaviours and attitudes on children and strive to become role models.



This image illustrates a process that evolves like a spiral. It is through learning, with space for free critical thinking, that each child and young person will be able to build and practice a positive relationship with herself or himself, the other, the environment and with that which people refer to as God, Ultimate Reality, or Divine Presence.

This building of positive relationships will enrich their innate spirituality, opening up avenues for growth, mutual understanding and respect for people of different religions and civilizations. This will in turn enable children and young people to be partners in building with others a world based on values and practices that safeguard human dignity and promote solidarity, individual and collective responsibility, and reconciliation.

The first of the elements of the educational approach we would like to introduce is 'Interconnectedness'. This is a central element that also brings the other elements together. It is important for educators to understand that in the educational approach, the different elements work together and are not to be understood as elements to be developed separately. While each of the other elements are described below separately for ease of understanding, it is important that educators visualize the cohesive approach.

The learning involves children and youth in teaching and practicing an approach to life based on ethics and values, allowing space for free critical thinking, while nurturing spirituality.

## **Interconnectedness**

Interconnectedness is an acknowledgement of a common humanity, the humanity in and of all others. It is an acknowledgment that one's own identity is shaped in relation to others. Interconnectedness can also be expressed through the term "Ubuntu," which can be freely translated as "I am because you are."

Interconnectedness also means that children and youth should be encouraged to identify where they wish to place themselves in society and understand the web of interrelations with others; they need support to develop consciousness of their place and role. Understanding the interconnectedness of humanity and our shared responsibilities can help children and youth to expand their circles of concern and care for others.

## How can it be fostered?

Ethical reflections, attitudes and behaviours can be strengthened by:

- ⚙ Creating opportunities for children and youth to identify and reflect on this interconnectedness and shared responsibility.
- ⚙ Allowing transitions between the immediate and the bigger picture, and
- ⚙ Helping them to connect inner and outer dialogues.

Interconnectedness does not happen immediately; it is created throughout the program by:

- ⚙ Creating opportunities to get to know the self, one another, explore each other's views, experience moments together, challenge one's ideas about the other, and create connections and relations.
- ⚙ Allowing children to learn to be in silence, to rediscover their own essence and recognize the ways they react to and approach difficult situations.
- ⚙ Creating spaces for children and youth to meditate, to learn about themselves, how to breath, to calm down, to find alternatives and stop when they feel their dignity is trampled upon, or they feel close to reacting violently.
- ⚙ Fostering the capacity in children to maintain their centre when they face contradictions and nurture equanimity through exercising detachment and managing their emotions.

Facilitators need to be aware of this important element from the beginning of the design and planning of their programs to ensure that the ethics education programs foster a weaving together of stories of life, change, discovery and action among the participants.

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** The next three elements are essential for educators to ensure throughout the planning, design, facilitation and monitoring of ethics education experiences. Interconnected, these elements help to build a learning environment that is suitable to initiate an ethics education program where further elements can be explored and strengthened over time. The educators carry a more direct responsibility in ensuring these elements.



### Safe Learning Environments

Safe learning environments are welcoming and embracing spaces that enable the active, inclusive, genuine and interactive participation of children, youth, and facilitators in the programs. Safe learning environments (SLE) create the adequate conditions to support and encourage participants to be themselves, share, express their thoughts, feelings and beliefs, and connect with one another.

Creating a safe learning environment requires ample time for interaction, reflection and discovery about oneself in relation to others, in order to build trust before moving into sensitive subjects. It also requires understanding the context, needs and profile of the participants, by being

sensitive to each participant in terms of their gender, age, religion, culture, and language, among others.

### How can it be fostered?

- ⚙ Creating a physical space that meets children's need for protection.
- ⚙ Providing a common ground for sharing and for trusting one another.
- ⚙ Creating opportunities for children to be who they are without fear of being judged.

A safe learning environment allows everyone to be authentic and yet feel protected and secure. The creation of an SLE requires the facilitator to:

- ⚙ Establish horizontal relations, to be vulnerable in order to encourage children's openness and genuine, meaningful interactions.
- ⚙ Ensure that participants' ideas, opinions and suggestions are taken into consideration.
- ⚙ Build knowledge together and make participants feel valued and recognized.

A SLE is created through inclusive practices such as:

- ⚙ Calling each person by name.
- ⚙ Acknowledging the presence of each and everyone.
- ⚙ Appreciating differences and similarities in the group.
- ⚙ Dealing constructively with any smaller groups, which form within the bigger group.
- ⚙ Using several methodologies that cater to the diverse learning needs and styles of the participants.
- ⚙ Engaging children and youth in discussions on the need for and importance of safety in the learning process, when appropriate.
- ⚙ Collectively identifying strategies and commitments for ensuring a safe environment.



## Participatory and Collaborative Learning

Learning can happen individually, but it is through collaboration with others that children and youth can challenge their views, develop new ideas, learn about and broaden their own perspective on the diversity of the world, and enrich themselves, while exploring their own identity. Participatory and collaborative learning entails opportunity for full participation by each and every person, inclusive practices, diversity-embracing methodologies and techniques, and respect for each participant's way of learning and interacting.

### How can it be fostered?

- ⚙ Understanding participants' learning styles.
- ⚙ Using a variety of techniques, as the ones promoted in the Learning to Live Together manual.
- ⚙ Using innovative materials.
- ⚙ Building on the knowledge, skills and resources, which participants also bring to the experience.
- ⚙ Providing spaces and planning activities for children to exchange views, collaborate,

discuss, engage in dialogue, and participate in experiential and problem-solving exercises.

- ⚙ Using collaborative games and the arts.



## Context-sensitivity

Learning to Live Together programs not only need to incorporate an understanding of the children's own context and social reality, but should also be customized to the particular context where the program takes place.

This requires awareness of the issues affecting the children and youth, issues affecting the community, and any socio-political dynamics in the group. It also requires ensuring, when appropriate, a diverse group of facilitators and children in terms of gender, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

### How can it be fostered?

A facilitator can ensure that the program is context-sensitive by using cultural and local based activities that respectfully respond to local and cultural traditions, and by including different perspectives and resources.

To ensure that a program is context-sensitive, the facilitator needs to:

- ⚙ Analyse the context, socio-economic and political realities, conflict issues, as well as the needs of the children;
- ⚙ Plan the program to include the voices of different groups and with consideration not only for how the context can affect the program but also how the program can influence the context;
- ⚙ Consider the language, minority-majority relations, power dynamics, ages and cultural, ethnic and religious diversity;
- ⚙ Ensure that all materials are sensitive to the context, that they do not portray any particular bias for or against one group or the other, or display any sense of segregation or discrimination;
- ⚙ Make sure that the facilitator team also represents the different religious, cultural and language diversity of the group;
- ⚙ Create a safe learning environment before discussing conflicts or causes of violence or injustices in society with the group.
- ⚙ Make sure to use inclusive methodologies that encourage the voices of everyone and respect for everyone's ideas and opinions.

**TRANSFORMATIONS:** The next group of four elements relate to the transformations in children and youth engaged in the ethics education programme that can enhance their capacity to make well-grounded ethical decisions and nurture their spirituality.



## Critical Thinking

Critical thinking goes beyond the capacity to argue against or in favour of a belief or idea, it entails the capacity to be open to multiple narratives, understand others' arguments, find alternatives and challenge one's own views and perspectives on the world without fear of shaping one's identity.

Critical thinking is an on-going process of personal transformation and is at the core of the educational approach as it enables children and youth to reflect about their dilemmas, their decisions, how they affect them and others, and comprehend the world by themselves.

### How can it be fostered?

- ✿ Providing spaces for interaction, inter-relation and meaningful dialogue with one another.
- ✿ Connecting inner and outer dialogues.
- ✿ Using strong questioning and listening skills to create powerful dialogues.
- ✿ Encouraging open questions.
- ✿ Allowing children to ask and respond freely, and to ask again and again "why?" in order to enter into a process of unlearning.
- ✿ Using materials and methodologies that are relevant to the context and children's realities, that encourage discussion, that allow children to seek and find solutions and alternatives from different points of view and that create opportunities to see issues from different angles.
- ✿ Helping children and youth understand the tendency towards biases, stereotypes and misperceptions and the consequent need to go beyond the surface of an issue.



## Conscientization (Critical Consciousness)

Conscientization refers to the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action.

This is a very important component of the educational approach whereby educators relate concepts, discussions, methodologies and activities to children's own realities and social context. Conscientization goes beyond describing the reality "out there"; it entails inner and outer dialogues that help raise awareness about one's own place within the specific context and what can be done to transform it. It is an active process of transforming power relations and vertical relationships.

Participants are encouraged to think critically, develop meta-cognitive skills and be constantly reflective about the learning, sharing and changes in their own processes.

## How can it be fostered?

- ⚙ Creating opportunities for interaction with people of different backgrounds.
- ⚙ Providing spaces to reflect upon and identify the causes of violence and injustices in society.
- ⚙ Offering opportunities for participants to find ways to transform those situations within their own sphere of influence.
- ⚙ Providing opportunities to reflect on experiences, situations around them and the world, the impact of those on society and individuals, and in so doing, to develop a sense of solidarity with others.
- ⚙ Developing meaningful dialogues.
- ⚙ Promoting the use of journals.
- ⚙ Creating experiential activities that challenge the way children and youth see the world around them.
- ⚙ Listening to different narratives and meeting people of different backgrounds and ways of thinking.
- ⚙ Challenging preconceived ideas, the privileges each person has or the lack of them, and the power that lies within each person to change the self and inspire changes in others.



### Imagination

Imagination is the capacity of children and youth to envision possibilities, new relationships, connections or realities. Imagination can support children and youth as they consider ethical and non-violent alternatives to address problems they face, transform conflicts into peaceful realities, and aspire to learn to live together. Nurturing children's imagination can also promote their spirituality, their connections with themselves, others, nature and that which people refer to as God, Ultimate Reality, or Divine Presence.

## How can it be fostered?

- ⚙ Promoting spaces for children draw inspiration and re-envision themselves, their relations with others and their communities, especially in situations where the immediate reality is challenging in terms of the absence of safe space or the presence of violence and conflicts.
- ⚙ Using the arts, storytelling, music and contact with nature.
- ⚙ Cultivating a sense of inner space and freedom so children can develop their own vision and understanding.
- ⚙ Nurturing and stimulating children's senses, eliciting the potential to see new things, appreciate different smells, or become aware of different sounds.





## Self-Driven Learning

Self-driven learning means that children and youth are allowed to choose and be in charge of their own learning, driven by their own curiosity and intrinsic motivation. Children and youth must know what the journey they are starting together with the facilitators is about, and be free to explore, engage, stop, think, discuss, and ask questions, whatever they might be.

Self-driven learners will connect the inner and outer dialogues in their lives, and find intrinsic motivation for learning. The facilitators' responsibility is to provide spaces where children and youth can be actively involved in the development of programs, make suggestions, and use resources they are familiar with.

Facilitators define clear objectives, set the scene and facilitate the program, but the results and outcomes of that learning process are developed primarily by the group of participants.

### How can it be fostered?

- ✿ Preparing the sessions using the learning process proposed in the Learning to Live
- ✿ Together manual, so participants are actively involved in the experience and more aware of the changes happening inside of them.
- ✿ Stimulating curiosity about the topic to be discussed.
- ✿ Using techniques that motivate participants to further explore ideas and gain new experiences through practical exercises. The exploration of the topics should be followed by a moment of meaningful dialogue, so participants can exchange ideas, share experiences, discover the other and challenge their own perceptions.
- ✿ Providing time for individual reflection, ensuring connections and continuity among the different learning sessions in the program and creating space for children and youth to share their life applications of any lessons learned.
- ✿ Recognizing and appreciating participants' learning efforts.
- ✿ Promoting the use of the learning log to ensure that participants connect with themselves and constantly reflect on their discoveries, their own learning process, strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and what they want to learn and improve.
- ✿ Using other available tools such as the monitoring and impact assessment tools included in the manual, which allow for learning, unlearning and assessing one's own progress.



## Collective Action

Collective action refers to children and youth working together and taking actions that can transform the realities around them. This strengthens the praxis, or the oscillation between theory and practice shown in the figure earlier, as part of the learning experience.

Such collective actions allow children to strengthen positive relationships and develop mutual

**COLLECTIVE ACTION:** This element is no longer referring to an individual development of children and youth but their willingness, ability and opportunity to work together.

understanding and trust among one another. Instead of seeing each other as competitors or strangers, they start seeing each other as companions in a shared journey. It also helps to develop a shared collective identity and gives children across socio-cultural divides opportunities to strengthen intercultural and interfaith learning.

## How can it be fostered?

Collective action is a facilitated process involving exploration, dialogue and meaningful interactions designed to allow participants to go through a shared learning journey. Over time, the children themselves become more able to engage with each other to identify and respond to ethical challenges they encounter during their journey.

- ✿ Creating the spaces for children and youth to envision new realities and find ways to bring them to fruition in their sphere of influence.
- ✿ Creating spaces to putting into practice the elements of the educational approach, practicing critical thinking, critical consciousness, self-driven learning and imagination.
- ✿ Allowing participants to come up with their own solutions and take ownership of the processes and outcomes.
- ✿ Encouraging participants and allocating resources for them to take actions collectively that will enhance their awareness of their common humanity, their shared responsibilities and develop their individual and collective identities with respect for their differences.



### Role-Modelling

Educators are encouraged to become role models, embodying what they are trying to transmit, and thus inspiring children and youth to reflect and be motivated to discover themselves in relation to others in the midst of diversity and contradictions.

Role modelling can help to multiply the program's effectiveness in helping participants learn to live together in a global and plural society. Learning to Live Together programs encourage the development of horizontal relationships between children and adults, the demonstration of attitudes, behaviours and actions that are ethical, and mutual understanding and respect.

**ROLE-MODELLING:** The final element, which is a vital element of the educational approach, relates to the educator, him or herself, and his or her own development.

This demands consistency between the facilitators' words, behaviours and actions. Role modelling is an on-going reflective practice that entails being conscious about the impact that one's behaviours and attitudes may have on children and youth.

As a role model, facilitators are encouraged to share appropriate personal experiences of dilemmas with children to encourage horizontal dialogue; they also need to be genuine in their approach and relations with children without being afraid of showing that sometimes they do not have answers to questions. Role models are not meant to be perfect, but to be persons who

are in an on-going process of reflecting on the ethical implications of their behaviour and acting upon those reflections to become better persons in relation to themselves, others, nature and society. Facilitators are called to act in a way that is open, embracing and inclusive.

## How can it be fostered?

Facilitators can work on being a role model by:

- ⚙ Keeping their own learning log.
- ⚙ Constantly reflecting on their attitudes and behaviours, the way they apply ethical values in their interactions with others, and their practice as teachers.
- ⚙ Sharing their reflections with peers, with a mentor.
- ⚙ Revisiting the learning log and thus better understanding where they are, where they want to be and how to get there.

When these elements of the Ethics Education Approach are practiced together with the exploration of the key conceptual elements and values of the ethics education framework, it is possible to create educational environments that are truly transformational and contribute to the vision of Learning to Live Together.

Thus, it is the responsibility of facilitators to continuously strengthen these elements in the educational experiences provided to children and youth, and to pursue their own personal development so they can model the ethical principles and values to inspire transformation and create a better world for children and youth.



