



2017-2018 EMC Community-Based Research Project

EMCommon Spaces: Intercultural Approaches to Social Integration

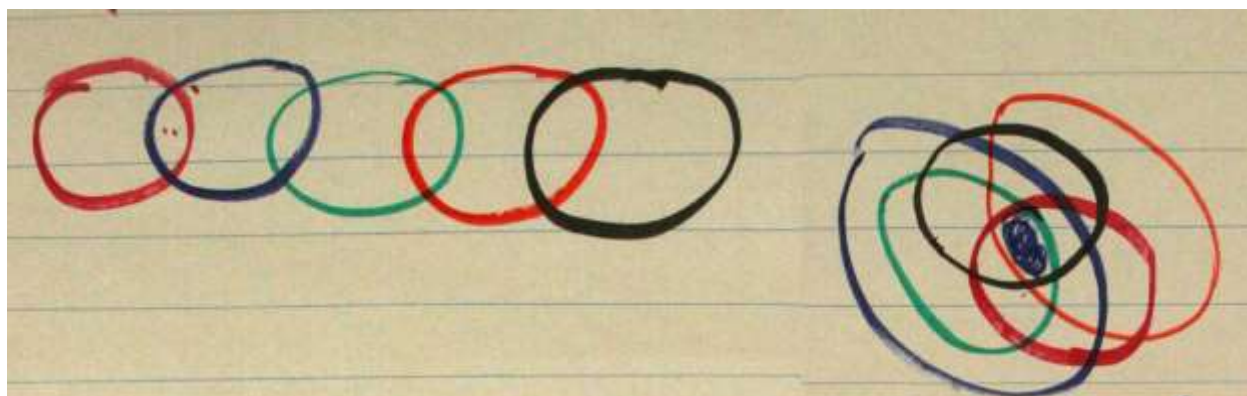
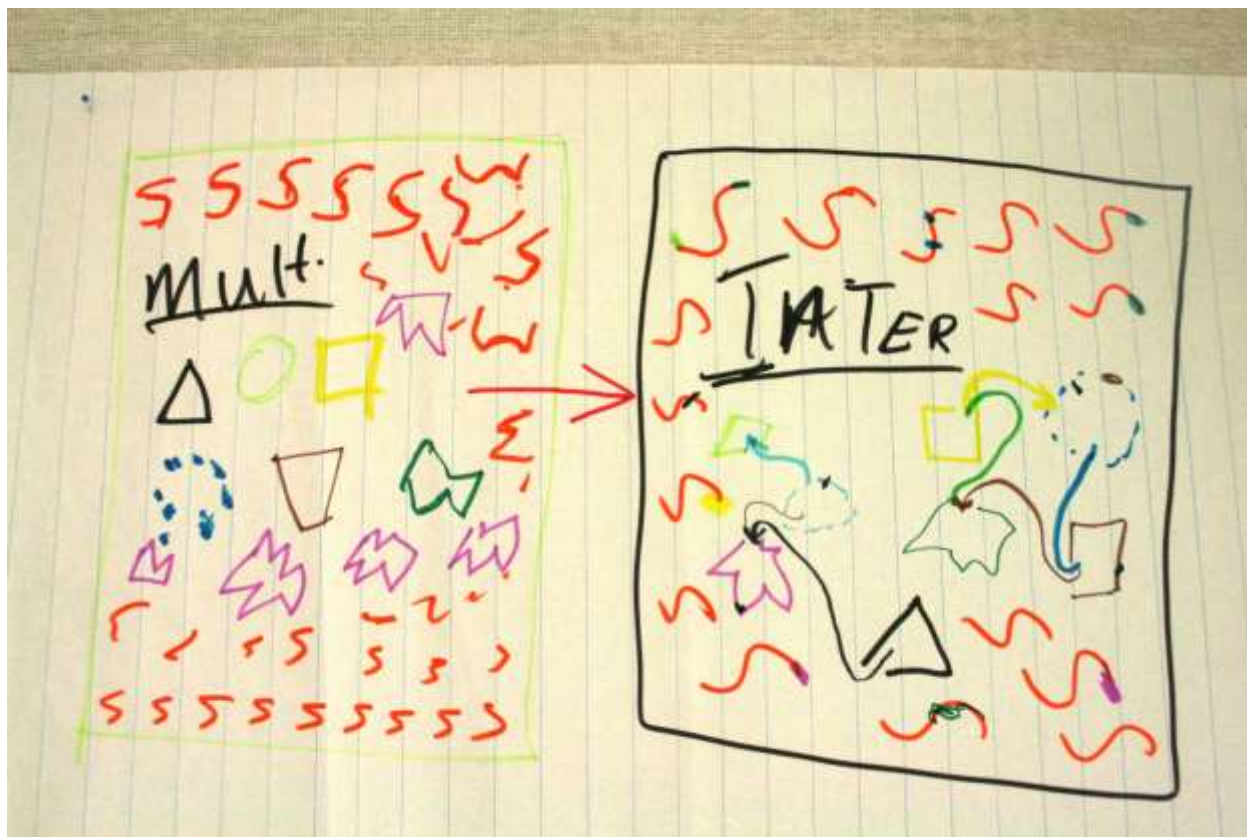
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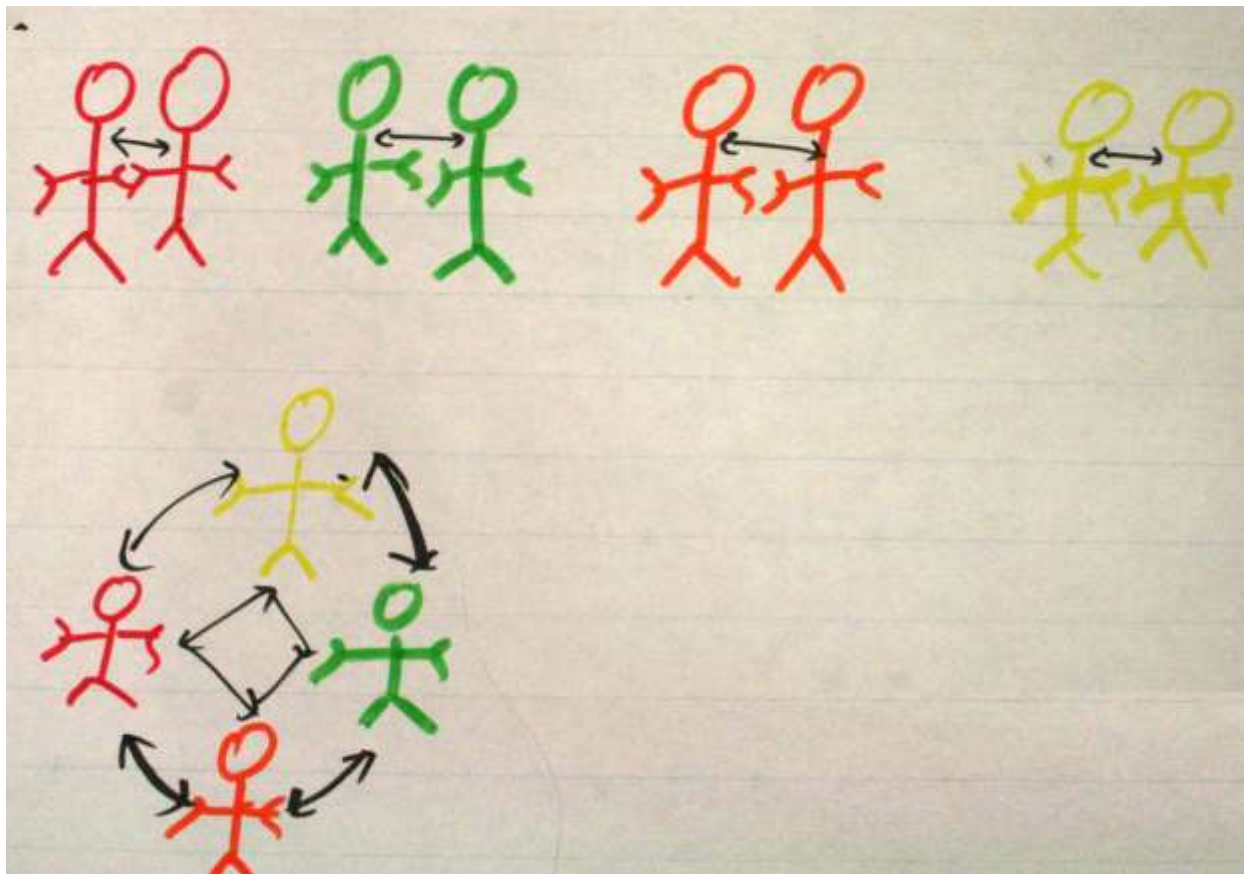
Abstract/Summary

Through collaborative, exploratory and open-ended research a small group of community co-researchers came together to ask: What is interculturalism and how might it inform our understandings and experiences of social integration in our personal lives, communities and institutions? In other words, we asked what might an intercultural approach to social integration look like and feel like? And in what kind of spaces might it occur? Through learning by doing we aimed to come up with practical examples of “intercultural” approaches to “social integration” together.

Our research was collaborative, exploratory, multi-modal, shared (co-created and co-documented) and “intercultural.” It was intercultural in the sense that we emphasized relations between different (and similar) cultures, where “culture” is interpreted very broadly (including, but not limited to, ethnocultural differences).

From Multicultural to Intercultural





Critical to our approach was coming to understand interculturalism relative to multiculturalism. We relied heavily on visualization processes as well as personal stories to come to shared understandings of these concepts. See the 3 examples above.

Immigrant and Host communities

Exploring the roles of the various “stakeholders” in the social integration process was key to our research. To do this we considered the the notions of “host communities” and “immigrant communities,” through the intercultural understanding that all parties have the responsibility to change. We considered host communities through two broad categories, Indigenous Peoples and Settler Canadians. The term Settler Canadians was

proposed because it acknowledges—rather than ignores—colonial history in Canada. This category is similar to EMC’s use of mainstream communities. All of these terms were challenged, suggesting a need to revise the definition of immigrant communities, particularly in relation to the social integration process. Consideration of the roles and responsibilities of immigrants/settlers relative to Indigenous Peoples was emphasized.

Findings/Themes

So what did we experience and what did we find out? And how might our understandings and transformations inform new research and practice?

IDENTITY / BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS / CONNECTIONS

Together we arrived at three themes that we felt were important to share and explore at our share-back event. We decided to share about these themes in the ways we approached each of our workshops: by encouraging different, multiple and changing perspectives—as opposed to one standardized or final set of answers.

Identity

This theme was largely about critically looking at labels and considering our own identities. We considered how identities can both help and hinder us. We deemed this important because the very idea of social integration implies various distinctions: lines are drawn between “newcomers” and “hosts” or categories are created delineating those who just arrived, those who arrived long ago, and those who have never arrived because they have always been here. We found that the distinction between these categories is not always clear and is influenced by ethnicity, race, time and so many

other factors. Identities such as “settlers,” perhaps especially white or racialized settlers, can occupy both categories “newcomer” and “host,” for example. Overall, this research pushed us to each reflect deeply on our own identities particularly in relation to what we consider our responsibilities in the social integration process to be. We considered how important it is to challenge the identities assigned to us and understand that our identities are relative and situated and changing. We considered how sometimes we need to reject those identities that are easy to live with and take up those that challenge us. For example, we learned about and reflected on what it means to be an ally to Indigenous peoples.

Particularly because we are all living in a time of ongoing colonization where racism and patriarchy is systemic, our intercultural research challenged us all, in different ways, from different positions, to somehow ask this same question: In reality who am I? We discussed the importance of challenging the labels assigned to us and the ways of being they prescribe. We considered the importance of understanding power and privilege and how our societies and systems continue to be shaped by the permeance of dominant mainstream culture. We also discussed the importance of understanding the specific colonial history of Canada with Indigenous Peoples and ways that our obligations as Treaty People can inform us as we strive to achieve social integration and harmonious inter-relations among all peoples living in Canada. We considered how as individuals and communities we have agency and can choose to define many aspects of our identities, and as a result, change the way we relate to others across differences. One place to start is by entering into relation with communities unknown to us.

Building relationships

The above consideration of identity brings us to the second theme: building relationships. During one of our workshops we addressed the question of how to institutionalize interculturalism. Through a process of “open share,” a suggestion that resonated was that perhaps the only way to move ahead is to be and do “in relation with” one another. At this point we had been discussing the role of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the social integration process.

We had discussed the advantages of Indigenous Peoples taking a leadership role in building cross-cultural relations with newcomers to encourage understanding of the history, contributions and challenges of Aboriginal peoples. It became clearer and clearer that we needed to find ways to be relational in order to better grasp these notions and begin to see what they might look like in practice.

This led to us to build a relationship with Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. Teachings and experiences we received from Bent Arrow largely informed our Shareback event. Not only did we emphasize respecting Indigenous protocols and the inclusion of a prayer, we placed emphasis on the kind of relationality that Indigenous perspectives can offer, such as the deep sharing and learning made possible by the sharing circle. For us the theme of building relationships was an experience we tried to emulate at the share back event, by opening up different avenues for learning together reciprocal sharing.

Making connections

Finally, this brings us to the last theme. Making connections for us was largely about attending to those teachings that emerge out of the building relationships experience. They can be those ah-ha moments where we realize for example that we are more similar than we may have thought. Or, they can be ideas or practices that resonate with us in ways that can provoke us to think, feel, or act differently. These are often experiential moments that force us to reconsider our roles or identities in particular contexts. Key to making connections is being present and listening, which is again some of the sensibilities we hoped to achieve through the our interactive approach to sharing with others what we learned at the shareback event. In many ways, making connections, like the two other themes, are experiences that are tacit, they are much easier to understand through experience, rather than explanation.

Taken together, these themes informed our approach of sharing our research about interculturalism by being in relation—by building a common space where we can all be free to be both different and the same as we sit together and try to address some of this difficult and messy work.