Incentives and obstacles linked to the use of cultural practices in the process of fighting illiteracy

STAKES
What is illiteracy? What issues are at stake regarding the field of illiteracy and the use of cultural practices to address unschooled or feebly schooled publics?

Stakes / Obstacles / Difficulties	Incentives
« Illiteracy » as a stigmatized word « Illiteracy » is a negatively connoted word conveying the idea of inability and shame. Trainers themselves are too often trapped in those representations: illiterate learners are considered difficult and unlikely to get educated.	Triggering a change in common representations Talking about « literacy » instead of « illiteracy » seems more neutral. Taking self-esteem and image restoration into consideration.
Language and culture: a tensed relationship Learning a language necessarily is a subjective matter to the eye of a learner since it deals with general History as well as personal histories: belonging to a monologuistic or to a plurilinguistic country gives different perspectives, as well as associating a language to the idea of colonization (which would be the case of French learning African populations), to the idea of domination (causing Napoli dialect speakers to refuse to learn Italian), to the idea of uprooting etc. There is a strong cultural dimension in the relationship of an individual to a language.	Assessing the (inter)cultural dimension of language Taking the cultural dimension into account while teaching / learning a language, which appears both in its conveying a cultural content and in its relative, subjective value. Acknowledging plurilinguism as a source of richness, not a source of identity turmoil and relying on plurilinguistic skills so as to ease the apprenticeship
Illiteracy, apprenticeship and citizenship Cultural action can be a springboard for apprenticeship and vice versa. But furthermore, what voice and what place do illiterate persons own in society? Is apprenticeship enough?	Cultural action and apprenticeship meaning Functions of a cultural action: -To discover oneself: identity building and self confidence -To discover others and to discover the world: social interactions, networking, Apprenticeship needs to be justified
Part played by culture in apprenticeship Learners tend to think that culture does not suit them or that culture has nothing to do with the apprenticeship of a language. They have the feeling that culture should not be a priority, that it is a waste of time distracting them from their learning objectives. Others think that their low level of literacy prevents them from enjoying cultural activities.	This issue deals with the expressive and social functions of language. « I can encounter a meaning thanks to language ». Culture helps to give a meaning to language and to the learning process; it allows the learners to take an active part in their own learning ship. Time perception Principles of immediacy and efficiency need to be overcome in order to work on a long-term basis allowing a progression. Integrating and transmitting a failure proof attitude.

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	Cultural practices permit detours, trials and errors, non-linear advancements.
What kind of culture should be transmitted? Trainers have a tendency to promote their vision of art as the only one worthwhile. When it comes to their learners' culture, two opposite visions prevail: - A *charity-like, condescending vision* considering that feebly schooled persons have no culture at all or, at best a « poor » culture. - A *populist vision* praising on the contrary the richness and the superiority of the learners' cultural background and practices.	**Using the learners' culture as a starting point** There is a necessity to acknowledge the fact that learners own a form of culture that should be valued. Have the learners become subjects and actors of their own culture Rely on the learners' culture while opening the apprenticeship to other forms of culture.

MEANS OF ACTION

What elements are to be taken into account while setting up a cultural action addressed to a public dealing with language difficulties and that are induced by the choices made: forms of action, themes, media…

The setting and the aims of the action must be defined clearly as a first step:

- What form of action should be taken? Differentiate cultural activities (tours, trips, outgoings, show attending) from artistic practices (facing an artistic language in a workshop-like way),

- What type of artistic practice should be chosen ? In relation to what goals (educational, civic-minded, artistic)? What artistic discipline (visual arts, drama, photo, video) should be picked given that each one of them has specific benefits regarding learning ship (relationship with body and space, oral expression, relationship to time and History, vocabulary, etc.) and given that the articulation of 2 artistic languages often turns out to be productive in terms of apprenticeship?

- Who should be associated to this type of action (institutional, cultural, artists partners) bearing in mind the idea of co-construction?

- What length (yearly, quarterly, monthly) and what periodicity are to be adopted, keeping in mind that undertaking a long-term project takes a lot of planning but can also help to work on progression and self confidence.

- What end is expected and what role does cultural action play in the process of apprenticeship or training? Is it a tool or a medium integrated to the learning process or a specifically framed, autonomous activity which experience can be exploited later on in the learning process?

Obstacles / Difficulties	**Incentives**
Cultural contents and values While planning cultural trips (plays, movies), choosing a piece can be tricky as it implies to be confronted to taboos or prohibitions linked to culture or religion (nakedness for example). Moral principles may act as a source of fear or guilt and hinder expressive or imaginative activities.	Cultural contents and values The learners must take part in the selection process of the pieces of art used. The chosen themes have to echo in some way the life paths of the learners and to meet their interests. The context of artistic practice must be based on the wording of specific directions. The preciseness of direction confines and expands imagination all at once, so as to create a productive constraint. Disobeying directions is a way among many others to

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Issues linked to illiteracy and issues linked to cultural or religious affiliations or to the status of cultural minorities in their country (Gypsies in Romania, in Spain or in Portugal; Africans in France or in Belgium) are likely to be mingled or jumbled.

Dealing with emotions in a situation of self expression
Artistic practice workshops tend to cause emotional floods exposing parts of the private, intimate life of learners – particularly painful or taboo events -.
Trainers have trouble in handling this type of situation.

Hinge between individual and collective dimensions
How to switch from *I* to *we* and from *we* to *I*.

Stakes of visual literacy
Shouldn't visual illiteracy be of concern as well? In the same way as Illectronism is. In a society relying on digital technologies and giving a very large place to image, image reading is an important issue.
Against all odds, reading an image is in no way easier than reading a text. An image has its own functioning and the way to analyze it changes from one culture to another. Text messaging is another example of code that needs to be worked on. It constitutes a category of language as opposed to other categories of language.

Resistance of the trainers
The ignorance of cultural practices, the lack of cultural sensibility and/or motivation are known to be the prior clogs to the setting of cultural activities in a situation of apprenticeship.

appropriate them.
Compensate the limited nature of the direction given with an open context of learning ship.

Expression and emotion
Highlight and provoke the idea of pleasure.
Take the emotional dimension resulting from artistic practices into account: define borderlines but without fearing it in principle. It may be the sign that a creation-friendly space of mutual trust has been created.

Hinge between individual and collective dimensions
Encourage individual expression but make sure to let it be shared collectively.
Try to reconcile sense and sensibility (relationship to the body and to feelings)

Deciphering images
The relationship to written forms of language must be associated to the relationship to image.
Boost visual decoding and familiarity to digital practices.

Intertwining prevention acts and illiteracy fighting acts
Furthering prevention actions involving with parents and children, as it has been done in Malta via national measures

Developing awareness and education of the trainers
Introducing the trainers to artistic practices (for example through an audio-visual editing workshop as it was the case in Marseille), and create a space of exchanges and experiences sharing thanks to educative courses focusing on the stakes of culture and cultural mediation.

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PARTNESHIPS AND MEANS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN THE VARIOUS ACTORS
How do the various partakers (trainers, artistic contractors, culture or cultural mediation professionals) cooperate? What are their respective roles, what type of relationship is in use, what are the preliminary agreements?   Some thought needs to be given to: - The trusting relationship of co-building that is to be established between partners all along the development of the project: from planning to achievement and assessment.   - The status of the trainer: what part should he play in the organization, the realization and the appraisal of the project?   - The choice of artistic contractors: beyond the value of their artistic work, what are their capacity and their level of dedication to work with a specific public?   - The establishment of a specifications bill to be shared among all the actors of the project.

Obstacles / Difficulties	Incentives
Positioning of the artist and positioning of the artistic contractor How does a trainer behave during an artistic practice workshop? As a mere participant like the other learners or is there a specific role for him to play? Artists facing illiterate publics are sometimes tempted to adopt a populist or idealizing attitude due to the eagerness to « do good », or to an aesthetic vision of poverty and misery. **Cultural mediation** Cultural mediation is a French specialty that has no equivalent in terms of Functioning in any other country. The presence of a third party dedicated to make the link between cultural pieces and their public can be of some value and yeti s sometimes a source of confusion. Appealing to an intermediary might imply that accessing culture cannot be done on one's own, and that culture is a gift rather than a rightful entitlement.	**Clearing the collaboration's modalities** The objectives of the action and the respective parts of the actors must be defined very precisely. A trainer positioning himself as a mere participant becomes the equal of his own students and is compelled to work and struggle with them, which gives a brand new set up to the relationship between teacher and pupil. Bear in mind the idea that learners have an equal need to give and to take. **Cultural mediation** The cultural mediator needs to be the matchmaker between a cultural offer and its public but he should be careful not to be himself an obstacle to the match by interposing. He must be able to step aside in order to allow an autonomous relationship to cultural practices.