

**RIMA**

**WORKSHOP**

HandBook for educators





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# INTRODUCTION

“The words, slowly and painfully,  
become action, life” (Danilo Dolci, 1984)<sup>1</sup>

The Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) is a dialectic method of inquiry and “popular self-analysis” for the empowerment of communities and individuals and it can be defined as a **“process of collective exploration that takes, as a departure point, the experience and the intuition of individuals”** (Dolci, 1996).

RMA is a group communication strategy (Habermas, 1986)<sup>2</sup> that enables all the elements in the group to give their ideas and opinions, contributing through this to the development of a final common idea in order to make a change in the individual and collective social/political/economic/ educational spheres (Mangano, 1992)<sup>3</sup>. The methodology was developed by Danilo Dolci from the Socratic concept of Maieutic: Socrates’ Maieutics is unidirectional, while for Danilo Dolci the concept of knowledge comes from experience and a reciprocal relationship is necessary. As the name says, RMA is a “reciprocal” process between at least two persons and it is normally done inside a group, with one person asking questions and others giving answers. It is the reciprocal maieutic communication that brings out people’s knowledge, with all participants learning from each other.

## Who is Danilo Dolci?

Danilo Dolci (Sesana, 28 June 1924 - Trappeto, 30 December 1997) was a sociologist, poet, educator and activist of Italian non-violence.

From 1952 he moved to western Sicily (Trappeto and Partinico, small villages close to Palermo) where he promoted non-violent struggles against the mafia and underdevelopment, for rights and work: such social commitment earned him the nickname of “Italian Gandhi” or “Gandhi of Sicily”

In his activity of social animation and political struggle, Danilo Dolci has always used coherence and courage together with the instruments of non-violence.

## Why RMA?

The RMA, developed by Danilo Dolci, is an important characteristic of the social and educational work of Dolci and his working method: he considered that no real change could ignore the involvement or the direct participation of those directly affected, rather than handing out “pre-packaged truths”.

The RMA comes from the concept of Socrates’ maieutic. It derives from the ancient Greek “**μαιευτικός**” that literally stands for the midwife art: every educational act is like giving birth to all the inner potentialities of the individual who wants to learn, as the mother wants her child to birth from her womb. Socrates’ maieutic compares the philosopher to the “midwife of knowledge” that does not fill the student mind with a priori information, but helps him/her bring his knowledge to light, using the dialogue as a dialectical tool. What makes the difference between these two concepts is the fact that Socrates’ Maieutic is unidirectional, while Danilo Dolci, despite the fact that knowledge can be born from experience and its sharing, requires reciprocity in communication.

In the meetings coordinated by Dolci, everyone learned to deal with others, to listen and to decide. It was during meetings with local farmers and fishermen that some of the most important ideas for change in western Sicily took shape.

These ideas were later put into practice, and they represented an important incentive for the economic development of the area, removing an important branch from the mafia: control over the limited available water resources, which could be an instrument of control over the citizens. Providing in this area of western Sicily, the birth and development of many companies and cooperatives, becoming an opportunity for economic, social and civil change.

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<sup>1</sup> **Dolci, D.** (1984). *The World is only one creature*. Warwick, Amity House.

<sup>2</sup> **Habermas, J.** (1986). *Teoria dell'agire comunicativo*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

<sup>3</sup> **Mangano, A.** (1992). *Danilo Dolci educatore*. S. Domenico di Fiesole (FI), Edizioni cultura della pace.



## The workshop

**“Many participants realised they had deeper needs and dreams - RMA workshops tend to transform such needs and personal dreams into shared objectives in order to make them become common social development projects.” (Giuseppe Barone)<sup>4</sup>**

The RMA workshop application of the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach is developed by Danilo Dolci. The completeness and simplicity of an RMA workshop can be disclosed only by those who experience it: questioning is a science and an art.

RMA has a wider applicability as educational approach so it can be adapted to different topics and situations, fostering participatory learning in a non-violent, stimulating and cooperative environment for learners. Going through the RMA process and therefore learn how to employ it, is an important achievement in the field of communication with sensitive targets.

The target group of the In&Out project is disadvantaged young people, with and without a migrant background. Their position as young people, foreigners and socially excluded, makes it difficult to express their opinions, thoughts and dreams, and places them in a passive position, as “receivers”, not always considering their opinions and dreams or listening to them.

Our project regards these young people as a resource, and through the RMA methodology, In&Out participants and all young people experimenting it, had the opportunity to express themselves, listen to each other and reach a common point, which is important for the development of the group and its individuals.

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<sup>4</sup> Barone, G. (2010) Una rivoluzione nonviolenta (Non-violent revolution). Italy.

The RMA learning process starts with a long-term process of analysis and discussion about meaningful themes, in order for the group to get deeper into feelings, inner perspectives and needs that people have. This process emphasizes individual learners' capacity to discover their own vital interests and to express their feelings freely.<sup>5</sup>

Through the RMA workshop, trainers and youth workers support youth development, by improving quality on communication competencies; analysing the meaning of key-words important in intercultural learning process; improving soft skills, such as: self-reflection, listening, empathy, open-mindedness and respect.

To apply the methodology RMA workshop, it is essential to consider the following general characteristics:

## **Group of people:**

The group can be made up of any kind of person in any age: children, youth or adults, professionals or ordinary citizens;

If possible, it is important to enable a coexistence between ordinary people, experts and professionals within the group;

The size of the group is maximum 20 participants and minimum 10.

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<sup>5</sup> Dolci, A.; Amico, F. (2009) **Reciprocal Maieutic Approach In adult education.** Lifelong Learning Programme – Sub- Programme Grundtvig. EDDILI. Project N.: 502999-LLP-1-2009-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP. <https://danilodolci.org/media/English.pdf>

## Coordinator:

There is only one RMA coordinator for each session;

He/she is the person who coordinates the session and guides the group in the maieutic process; in this case, the coordinator could be a youth worker, social worker or youth leader who is applying this module with a group of young migrants or disadvantaged young people;

The coordinator is not a leader or boss. One of the intrinsic features is to create a democratic dialogue where everybody has the possibility to listen, to question and to think about making responsible choices;

### **Advices on the characteristics of the Coordinator:**

- Capacity to coordinate the group and at the same time be at the participants' level
- Capacity to ask questions and analyse problems
- Capacity to “read” the group, capacity to feel empathy, capacity to value each individual experience
- Communication skills: active listening and capacity for clear expression, presentation, cross-cultural communication
- Capacity of summarizing and using key words
- Capacity to manage conflicts inside the group in a positive way
- Open to diversity
- Creativity.

## **Duration:**

Minimum duration is 2 hours.

Maximum duration suggested is 3 hours.

## **Space:**

Room or outdoor space, with enough space for all the group members to be in a circle, usually sitting in chairs.

The space is organized in order to create a democratic, non-hierarchical environment.

## **Tips for the RMA workshop in intercultural learning.**

This section contains a list of tips that were useful during the experimentation phase of the RMA workshop. The section includes general tips for the coordinator and for the development of the workshop, grounded in RMA theories. It further includes tips added by the In&Out partners, grounded in the experimentation phase, in order to adapt the methodology to the characteristics of the target group and needs of the project.

## **Tips for the coordinator:**

Use the RMA workshop to create a more cohesive group at the beginning of the In&Out process or in the middle to find common goals and interesting topics for the group.

The RMA workshop could also be used as a problem solving method, in order to share real needs and worries among the group members and further for them to try and find a common solution that comes directly from the group.

To ensure the effectiveness of the activities, it is advisable that the workshops are structured in at least two or three meetings and that there is not too much time between them (it is advisable not to exceed a maximum of ten days between one meeting and the next).

## Preparation...

It is not necessary to previously present the RMA theoretical framework.

The subject to discuss during the session is decided before the workshop, as it is necessary that everybody agrees on the theme.

To choose a proper subject, you can make a list of the most important topics came up during the sessions and let the group decide.

It is advisable for everyone to make a priori preparation (by reading documents, researching, bringing articles...)

The participants and coordinator are invited to sit in a circle, to create a democratic environment, warm, bright and comfortable.

## Introduction...

In the first meeting, the coordinator will start presenting him/herself, his/her background and a personal dream.

It is important to put emphasis on real needs, interests, desires and dreams first, in order to understand new relations.

After this introduction, it is important that the participants introduce themselves in a personal way or by presenting their personal dream. The coordinator will invite them to do it respecting the order of the circle.

Sharing dreams, especially within a group in which people do not know each other, helps to find common interests and desires, especially to discuss them gradually in subsequent meetings (But also in groups that already know each other, something new always comes up!)

It is useful to have a flipchart or a notebook to write down the diverse interventions and to keep a record of the outcomes of the session.

## Discussion...

The starting point of the discussion in an RMA workshop can be simply a word or two. Gradually each of these initial words are associated with an adjective, an idea or a point of view, and that is how the actual workshop activity begins.

The coordinator invites the participants to share their point of view from their personal experience one by one, remembering to respect the order of the circle.

### Example:

**What is art according to your personal experience?**

**What is creativity according to your personal experience?**

During this phase, the coordinator takes notes and summarizes the most important outcomes from each participant's reflexion.

It is time to discuss. The coordinator will continue asking questions regarding the words and the topic, and the group will answer, always using their knowledge and previous experiences as references.

### Example:

**Do you feel creative? In which moments?**

**Is art and creativity necessarily connected or not?**

During the session, the participants should ask if they can speak, creating an order that should be respected.

It is important that everybody listens actively to each other's voice.

The RMA coordinator can intervene and give his/her own contribution in order to enable true reciprocity.

## Conclusion...

To conclude the workshop, the RMA coordinator should synthesize all the interventions and summarize the questions emerging from the dialogue.

The group, together with the coordinator, could use the conclusion time to discuss and agree on the topic to be discussed during the next session.

The coordinator also invites participants to reflect individually and to reopen the discussion during the next workshop.

# GENERAL PART



## WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

### **General Objective/s of the workshop:**

- To exchange opinions, ideas and point of views
- To overcome limits and continue growing as a group and individuals
- To interact and meet each other using dialogue
- To analyse the meaning of the words, the difference existing between them and the potential effects of the concepts on the learning process.

The workshop can activate a process of interchange as well as a reciprocal enrichment. Only when communication between the workshop participants is functioning, it will be possible to see a continuous evolution of ideas.

### **Workshop general indicators:**

- 1 Level of Integration in the group – I feel part of the group
- 2 Ability to create relationship and team work – I feel self-confident and I have new relationship
- 3 The workshop as safe and protected environment where important topics can be discussed
- 4 Capacity of reflection on positive aspects and criticism of own and hosting culture ameliorated

**Target group:** Youth workers, teachers, educators, young people and volunteers (if possible, it is important to enable a coexistence between ordinary people, experts and professionals within the group).

**Duration of the workshop:** 120 min

**Number of participants:** 10- 20 pax.

### **General description of the workshop/instruction:**

The group, including the trainer, is sitting in a circle.

The trainer will be the RMA coordinator.

Introduce yourself and your background.

Invite each participant, respecting the order of the circle, to introduce him/herself by asking: **What is your personal dream?**

Take notes and summarize the most relevant things being said by the group.

Each participant starts to tell something about him/herself in a personal way. In this way, everyone can open up, by expressing themselves and listening to other people's point of view.

After the first round of personal introduction, introduce the issue or a "good question":  
**- What is the meaning of "..." according to your personal experience?**

Starting from these initial questions, invite the participants to focus on the arising questions and to say them out loud, following the order of the circle.

When all the participants have shared their reflexion, summarize the most important outcomes and continue to stimulate the discussion, asking more questions or telling them about your personal experience.

During the session, the participants should ask when they want to speak, creating an order that should be respected.

**Material/space:** Flipchart, pens and papers, definitions of both words

### **Questions for debriefing:**

To conclude, summarize for the last time all the main outcomes from the discussion and explain the real meaning and differences between intercultural and multicultural, from the etymology and morphology point of view.

Ask all the participants to do a short evaluation.

**Tips/variations:** Because of its wide applicability, RMA can easily be applied to a variety of other themes and fields. The maieutic circle should also be adapted to specific goals and to specific target groups.

The most important thing is to get to know the group first, how well they know each other, what their priorities or main needs are, what the group expects and desires to learn.

Inform yourself well about the morphology and etymology of the words that you will use during the session.

### **Tips and learning outcomes from the experimentation:**

Through the experimentation phase, in which each of the project partners had the opportunity to prepare, carry out and evaluate the method with their groups, we realised that the RMA workshop in the In&Out project context, could be proposed in different stages of the different stages of the four methods included in the In&Out project. It could be the first or the last method of the four to carry out, or it could even be done both at the end and the beginning.

It depends on the objectives to be achieved with the group of participants and the characteristics of the individuals. It will be a decision for the coordinator/trainer/youth worker leading the group.

- RMA workshop as part of teambuilding phase: Planned at the beginning of the path, as an introduction, the RMA method will offer the trainer the possibility to explore the topics and interests of the group, being able, to adapt the rest of the activities to the group needs. It will create a starting point to introduce the topics and to know the previous experiences of the participants.

• RMA workshop as part of conclusion and evaluation phase: Proposed at the end of the In&Out training course, this activity will be a conclusion, evaluation or reflection for the group. In this case, the group will be more consolidated and probably, the participants will feel more comfortable sharing some personal topics with their fellows, such as their dreams or their personal experiences.

Below, we share with you some of the difficulties that came up during our experimentation phase, in order to give the possibility to prevent them and to be ready...

- Knowledge vs. Transmission could be concepts that are too abstract, especially in groups with linguistic obstacles.
- Strong emotions and crying can be part of the experience when the participants share their personal stories. The RMA coordinator should be prepared to deal with that.
- Migrants can feel frustrated talking about how to be an active citizen.
- It is likely that the participants will feel more comfortable and eager to participate openly after spending some time on doing presentations.
- In some groups, the suggested time can be perceived as too long. In other cases, two hours is not enough and a suggestion is to then make a longer session with a break in the middle.
- In other cases, 2 hours couldn't be enough time and it could be an idea to make a longer session with a break in the middle.

### **Some of the topics used during the In&Out experimentation phase:**

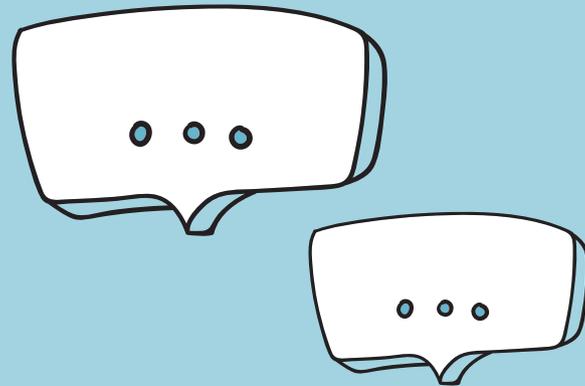
- Personal history
- Difficulties in the place where they live
- The racism and discrimination they are confronted with every day
- Art and creativity

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### **Resources:**

• **Dolci, A.; Amico, F. (2009) Reciprocal Maieutic Approach In adult education.** Lifelong Learning Programme – Sub- Programme Grundtvig. EDDILI. Project N.: 502999-LLP-1-2009-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP. <https://danilodolci.org/media/English.pdf>





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