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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

TOOL n. 5

“Towards ethno-relative horizons”

The tool is a device for the interpretation of the ethnocentric and ethno-relative degree in the process of acculturation based on evolution stages (denial, defence, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, integration)

DENIAL

Denial characterizes the inability of interpreting and be in a relationship with cultural diversity. The characteristic features of this behaviour are the constant application of stereotypes – even “positive” ones – or, alternatively, the use of superficial statements of tolerance. The general trend, though, is that of “de-humanizing” the other. At this stage, two typical attitudes may show: isolation and separation.

- Isolation refers to the lack of instruments to describe diversity and to the possibility that the subject live a true form of physical isolation with respect to the individual who is perceived as “different” (this is true for both parties, it could be true for either the autoctonous individual or the migrant).
- Separation emphasizes the lack of intercultural competence, and it is the intentional of physical or social barriers that accentuate the distance with respect to the individual who is perceived as “different”, in order for isolation to be maintained. It is in this environment that we find an accentuated nationalism, to segregate “diverse” people in the other's categories, the refuge in ethnically connoted behaviours.
- Regarding this stage, the key purpose for learning is the recognition of cultural differences. The main cognitive challenge concerns the formulation of a constructive vision of intercultural relations, through processes that stimulate curiosity and facilitate the well-structured contact with other cultures. The target of this stage should be the development of at least four types of competences:
 - to be able to collect suitable information about cultures
 - to be able to explore aspects of one's own individual culture
 - to be able to build trust, open-mindedness and cooperation
 - to be able to recognize diversity

DEFENCE

Defence is characterized by polarity thought (we/they), which often goes with negative stereotypes and evolutionist ideas on cultural development that sees one's own culture from a privileged point of view. Denigration and superior manners characterize the defensive posture. The defence category may also include the opposite behaviour of unconditional admiration of the other (Reversal), which mirrors the same logic and leads to denigrate the culture of origin (inferiority attitude).

- To denigrate implies that diversity be recognized, but also that this recognition goes with a negative evaluation (towards the others or ourselves) often due to prejudices prevailing towards such categories as ethnical belongingness, religion, characteristics connected to sex, age... .
- Regarding this stage, the key purpose of learning is to smooth over polarization emphasizing "common humanity", and similarities. The main cognitive challenge, and the part of the educational process to be supported, is about the direct experience of diversity and the ability to highlight, on the one side, historical context and at the same time the elements of similarity among groups who think they are different, for example common needs and goals. In terms of relationship this means to pay attention to the transformation of conflicts and group dynamics, highlight the abilities that make the openness and relation with diversity easier, the use of cooperative activities.
- The target of this stage should be the development of at least 4 types of competences:
 - to be able to keep self control
 - to be able to control one's anxiety
 - to be able to be tolerant
 - to be able to be patient

MINIMIZATION

A typical statement of the minimization stage could be "we are all equal" or "to be able to carry off with every culture, what matters is to be at ease with oneself, true and honest!". The minimization stage is still ethnocentric: those who recognize and are respectful of differences, but tend to minimize them, take into account superficial cultural characteristics (for example, food habits), but are truly convinced that human beings are all equal. In the opinion of a lot of organizations that make reference to intercultural, this is the stage where intercultural growth builds. Here the dominant concepts are physical universalism (we are all similar, after all) which sees a tight relationship between culture and biology and transcendent universalism ("we are all God's children"), which subordinates every human being to religious, supernatural or (social) philosophical entities.

- Regarding this stage, the key purpose of learning is the development of elements of self-awareness at cultural level. The most important cognitive challenges are about the recognition of categories and elements of reference to be able to understand one's own culture, including values and beliefs; to be open to understand the privileges of dominant groups; to be able to use materials for the cultural transmission of one's own culture, for example advertising and journalistic messages. The contact with people that have an ethno-relative attitude must be facilitated; opportunities for the research and sharing with diversity must be offered; the attention on the development of self-awareness at cultural level must be focussed.
- The target of this stage should be the development of at least six types of competences:
 - general cultural knowledge
 - open-mindedness
 - knowledge about one's own culture
 - active listening
 - to be able to perceive others accurately – to be able to keep an attitude of non-judging interaction.

ACCEPTANCE

The ethno-relative perspective originates with the acceptance of cultural diversity. That implies respect for differences as to behaviours, for example the changes in verbal and non verbal behaviours in different cultures, setting behaviours in their cultural environments. Developing awareness of one's values and references and the cultural construction of such values, allows to perceive the same values as processes (because values are ever-changing and evolving) and as useful instruments to decipher and organize the world, rather than a "toolkit" that each individual has since their birth and that cannot change in time. At this stage, the key learning goal is the analysis of culture clash.

- The main cognitive challenge is about the appropriate use of general (etic) and specific (emic) cultural categories, distinguishing cultural relativism from moral or ethical relativism. At educational processes level, it is the stage when fostering motivation and enthusiasm in the sharing of difference is appropriate in order to analyze deep contrasts. The most favourable and effective environment is that of quite guided intercultural experiences as, for example, a period of stay in another cultural context, but also role plays and simulations that require intercultural empathy.
- The target of this stage should be the development of at least six types of competences/knowledge:
 - specific knowledge at cultural level
 - cognitive flexibility
 - knowledge of other cultures
 - contextual knowledge
 - respect for the values and beliefs of other cultures
 - tolerance for ambiguity

ADAPTATION

Starting from the acceptance of cultural differences, the development of adaptation attitudes and, in particular, of abilities of intercultural communication are made possible. These are the requirements to be able to get in and out the different frames of meaning, adopting postures that favour empathy, the ability to put oneself in somebody's shoes, and adopt other points of view. To improve such competences allows people to have a pluralist attitude, being at ease in different contexts of reference.

- With respect to this stage, the key purpose for learning is the development of references to be able to make choices among the competences and the models available to face a variety of problems and situations. The main cognitive challenge concerns the development of cultural identity, by raising awareness of the ethnical models of intercultural sensitivity and preparing and managing the conditions to plunge back into the culture of origin in case of intercultural exchanges.
- At educational processes level, it is useful, at this stage, to be able to interact with cultural environments that have not yet been explored and face the elements connected to deep anxiety, such as individual dynamics of cultural shocks and identity conflict.
- The target of this stage should be the development of at least five types of competences/knowledge:
 - empathy
 - ability to run risks and deal with them
 - problem solving
 - managing of relational dynamics
 - flexibility

INTEGRATION

Integration is the most advanced stage of the ethno-relative behaviour, it idealistically characterizes a society or community where the whole of the players can behave in an ethno-relative manner (which is very far from the concept of integration intended as the migrant's "passive adaptation" attitude, with respect to the host society). While the adaptation stage entails the ability to make different contexts of reference live side by side in one's own repertoire, the progressive internalization of such frames of meaning allows to integrate them, not with the aim of making one's own cultural point of view prevail, nor to ensure simple coexistence, but in the awareness that intercultural confrontation is a dynamic process and each identity (including one's own identity) can be defined as "marginal" with respect to the different "given" cultures. All this has to do with refining competences as to the evaluation of contexts and deal with a "constructive marginalization" at the same time. This is not the ultimate goal for the learning process, but rather the starting point which allows an effective cultural mediation, the ability to cross and bridge different visions of the world.

- With respect to this stage, the key subject of learning is the focussing of multicultural identity features. The main cognitive challenges are relating to the models of cultural mediation, the comprehension of multicultural modalities that refer to the self and to society, the comprehension of ethical development models. At the level of educational processes, the goal is to favour a point of view on individual identity as a process and subject of choices, discussing the strategies that characterize the construction of cultural identity.
- The target of this stage should be the development of at least four types of competences/knowledge:
 - flexibility of roles
 - flexibility as to identity
 - ability to create new categories
 - development of a sense of irony that can adjust according to cultural diversity