Instructor : Mr BOUNADJA Semestre:2

Level : First year / Master degree

Module : ICC

Course :Two / Understanding the Components of Intercultural Competence

*Course Description:A mutual understanding can be made possible through formal and non-formal instruction enhances intercultural competence.*

*Course objectives*

By the end of this course, the students will be able to :

*An intercultural education is prerequisite for intercultural competence development in order to contribute to a peaceful coexistence.*

*Course content*

*Mutual understanding and intercultural competence are the fruit of an intercultural education that develops the ICC components i.e.knowledge, skills and specific attitudes transformed later into actions to co-exist with culturally diverse people.*

*In order to reach a peaceful co-existence, individuals need to have the will to develop increasingly an intercultural competence by practicing the above components. Only then, they can engage and co-operate into successful encounters. ICC is necessary for active, interactive and participative culturally diverse world.*

*Education as suggested by the Council of Europe(2010)referred to some purposes among which formal, non-formal and informal ways of instruction will help to achieve highly planned learning outcomes.*

*References*

*The internet*

*Discussion questions*

*………………………………………………………………………………………..*

*…………………………………………………………………………………………*

*Supplemental resources (Internet links)*

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Understanding the Components of Intercultural Competence

Introduction

Mutual understanding and intercultural competence are more important than ever before to avoid some emerging problems in our contemporary societies. Some of these problems are prejudice, discrimination and hate speech have become common, and political parties advocating extremist ideas. These problems are often linked to socio‑economic and political inequalities and misunderstandings between people from different cultural backgrounds and affiliations. Thus if there is a will to live in a peaceful world there must be an ability to understand and communicate with each other across all kinds of cultural divisions. Therefore education has to play a great role to help people acquire intercultural competence.

An intercultural education, which aims to develop and enhance this ability, can make an essential contribution to peaceful coexistence. The development of intercultural competence through education can make it easy to describe in details the nature of intercultural competence and its components, namely the specific attitudes, knowledge, understanding, skills and actions which together will enable individuals to understand themselves and others in a context of diversity, and to interact with individuals from other societies and cultures. In doing so, individuals who live in different societies from theirs will enjoy equality of opportunity and engage as full participants because they suffer from socio‑economic disadvantage and forms of discrimination which exclude them or confine them to the margins of society.

Intercultural competence is required to achieve harmonious interaction and successful communication among individuals with diverse cultures from different countries, or from different regional, linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds, or their lifestyle, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age or generation, level of religious observance, etc. An inter‑ personal encounter becomes an intercultural encounter when cultural differences are perceived and made salient either by the situation or by the individual’s own orientation and attitudes. Thus, in an intercultural interaction, one does not respond to the other person or people on the basis of their own individual personal characteristics. Instead, one may respond on the basis of their affiliation to another culture or set of cultures.

The Components of intercultural competence

The components of intercultural competence include attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills and actions.

The attitudes involve:

–– valuing cultural diversity and pluralism of views and practices;

–– respecting people who have different cultural affiliations from one’s own;

–– being open to, curious about and willing to learn from and about people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one’s own;

–– being willing to empathize with people who have different cultural affiliations from one’s own;

–– being willing to question what is usually taken for granted as ‘normal’ according to one’s previously acquired knowledge and experience;

–– being willing to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty;

–– being willing to seek out opportunities to engage and co‑operate with individuals who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one’s own.

The knowledge and understanding which contribute to intercultural competence include:

–– understanding the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups;

–– awareness and understanding of one’s own and other people’s assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices, and overt and covert discrimination;

–– understanding the influence of one’s own language and cultural affiliations on one’s experience of the world and of other people;

–– communicative awareness, including awareness of the fact that other peoples’ languages may express shared ideas in a unique way or express unique ideas difficult to access through one’s own language(s), and awareness of the fact that people of other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non‑verbal communicative conventions which are meaningful from their perspective;

–– knowledge of the beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products that may be used by people who have particular cultural orientations;

–– understanding of processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction, and of the socially constructed nature of knowledge.

The skills involved in intercultural competence include skills such as:

–– multiperspectivity – the ability to decentre from one’s own perspective and to take other people’s perspectives into consideration in addition to one’s own.

–– skills in discovering information about other cultural affiliations and perspectives;

–– skills in interpreting other cultural practices, beliefs and values and relating them to one’s own;

–– empathy – the ability to understand and respond to other people’s thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings;

–– cognitive flexibility – the ability to change and adapt one’s way of thinking according to the situation or context;

–– skills in critically evaluating and making judgments about cultural beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products, including those associated with one’s own cultural affiliations, and being able to explain one’s views;

–– skills in adapting one’s behaviour to new cultural environments – for example, avoiding verbal and non‑verbal behaviours which may be viewed as impolite by people who have different cultural affiliations from one’s own;

–– linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication;

–– plurilingual skills to meet the communicative demands of an intercultural encounter, such as the use of more than one language or language variety, or drawing on a known language to understand another (inter-comprehension);

–– the ability to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges, including skills in translating, interpreting and explaining.

Possessing the above components alone may be insufficient for an individual to be competent enough in interacting with people from other cultures if these are not put into practice. During intercultural encounters often fail to apply their intercultural attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills through actions.

Relevant actions include:

–– seeking opportunities to engage with people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one’s own;

–– interacting and communicating appropriately, effectively and respectfully with people who have different cultural affiliations from one’s own;

–– co‑operating with individuals who have different cultural orientations on shared activities and ventures, discussing differences in views and perspectives, and constructing common views and perspectives;

–– challenging attitudes and behaviours (including speech and writing) which contravene human rights, and taking action to defend and protect the dignity and human rights of people regardless of their cultural affiliations.

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This last may entail any or all of the following actions:

–– intervening and expressing opposition when there are expressions of prejudice

or acts of discrimination against individuals or groups;

–– challenging cultural stereotypes and prejudices;

–– encouraging positive attitudes towards the contributions to society made by

individuals irrespective of their cultural affiliations;

–– mediating in situations of cultural conflict.

Intercultural competence is a basis for the foundation of active individuals in societes and institutions different from theirs so as to become global citizens. Intercultural competence is important for active, interactive and participative dimensions, and it requires individuals to develop their capacities to build common projects, assume shared responsibilities and create common ground to live together in a culturally diverse world.

Education and Intercultural Competence Development

Intercultural competence can be developed through an Intercultural education which refers to a special ‘*pedagogy’* . The content, learning processes, teaching methods, syllabus and materials, and assessment having one purpose that is developing intercultural competence in learners of all ages in all types of education. Different ways were suggested by the Council of Europe (2010) for this purpose:

1. *Informal education* means a lifelong process whereby individuals acquire attitudes, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in their own environment and from daily experience and conversation (family, peer group, neighbours, encounters, library, mass media, work, play, etc.). For instance, what is learnt from parents, carers, peers, journalists and others in one’s social environment – intercultural competence is acquired with differing degrees of deliberate activity on the part of parents, carers, peers, journalists and others. Parents, for example, may have a *pedagogical* *approach* to developing intercultural competence which is more or less conscious and deliberate, or they may bring up their children with no deliberate intercultural purpose at all.

2. *Non‑formal education* means any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences outside the formal educational setting, and throughout lifelong learning. Adult education and social work in local communities may provide non-formal education to individuals in need for intercultural competence. This is a *pedagogical goal* pursued through deliberate inclusion of specific activities for learning.

3. *Formal education* may be received in form of structured education and training system in pre‑primary and primary through secondary school and on to higher education. It takes place at general or vocational educational institutions and usually leads to certification. It involves planned inclusion of learning outcomes defined in terms of the components of intercultural competence. In formal education, teachers play a great role in providing a curriculum with its high degree of planning, so as to develop intercultural competence in learners.

Conclusion

Throughout their various interactions in social or economic contexts, individuals are able to develop intercultural competences. It may be in informal learning thanks to parents and other children, or of adults learning together and from each other (for example, politicians, artists, media professionals, or community leaders, work colleagues or fellow students). In non‑formal education, a combination of youth workers and young people, or trainers and adults is of a crucial role. Finally, teachers or lecturers and fellow learners may be of valuable importance in formal education. Other factors may be of equal importance such as advice from books, imitating their own parents, adoption of what is customary in their community or follow practices on television, doing so intuitively. In informal learning, individuals constantly and intentionally learn from each other. They are more or less conscious of the influence of others on them throughout forms of imitation or observation that may not be of any intention.