Education for the prevention of discrimination

Basic Assumptions Document

1. The important concepts

Discrimination is any negative behavioral or verbal act, whether individual-collective or institutional, directed against individuals because of their origins, their sex, their family situation, their physical appearance, their name, their health status, their handicap, their genetic characteristics, their morals, their sexual orientation, their age, their political opinions, their unionist activities, their real or imagined «belonging» or «non belonging», to a given group, an ethnicity, a race or a particular religion.

Discriminations are based on different inherent psychological functions of humans. Thus, **social categorization** is an unconscious, universal phenomenon by which all new information is perceived, memorized and processed through a filter of previously acquired knowledge according to the principle of assimilation, between objects presenting common features. We put the objects which are similar, which have the same function or which in a given context seem near to each other in certain « boxes » (the categories).

When we encounter a new object we automatically activate the category which resembles it the most. We are able to easily recognize the object and above all to adopt the behavior that we consider the most appropriate. The same applies to people who in their turn are classified in the "boxes" according to a principle of similarity and of generalization. This classification is also based on our need for balance, for protection, for coping with our lack of tolerance of ambiguity, protecting us from our worries, making us capable of predicting the future in order to be able to control it. Everything that is unknown or inexplicable is a source of stress.

Following this, we construct categories as strategies of control in order to reassure ourselves. This categorization triggers mental constructions such as **stereotypes** which are

collections of assumptions we make regarding the characteristics or the attributes of a group (ex: all Swedish are big and blonde, Italians are seductive).

Such stereotyping is inevitable since our skills of processing information are not infinite and we do not have the ability that allows us to perceive and memorize the world that surrounds us as a whole. Without stereotypes we would have great difficulties in perceiving and interacting with others. However, we shouldn't forget that the simple act of arranging objects in categories of similarities leads us to overstate the resemblance of elements which are different.

Prejudices are also derived from the process of discrimination. As indicated by its name, prejudice is an attitude consisting of "prior judgment". It includes a value dimension which can be described as a predisposition to act in a certain way to a member(s) of a particular group.

Discriminative acts can be marked-for certain individuals- by **a need and a desire for dominance, for supremacy.** They find their explanation in a badly calibrated self-esteem: either the discriminators view themselves as "above" the common man and in particular above the community they stigmatize or their discriminatory acts are the result of a feeling of unrest, of fear, even of defense and they are caused by a weak self-esteem.

An **unfavorable economic situation in** a country or in a region can also reinforce discriminations. Thus we can easily observe how and how much a part of the population frequently of immigrant origins is stigmatized and discriminated against both verbally and physically if and when the rates of unemployment increases in a country due to a financial crisis. Let us here remark that, today, in many European countries, political parties, namely of populist far right ideology; instrumentalise the issue thus dangerously reinforcing the scapegoating phenomena that targets immigration as the main cause of unemployment and insecurity in our countries. This political assertion was once before used during the rise of the Nazi party in Germany in the 1930s-40s.

2. Existing tools for fighting against and preventing discrimination

A broad **legal framework** has been established for many years to fight against discrimination and punish it when it happens. A broad range of discrimination is prohibited by the 1945 United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the European Convention of Human Rights of 1950, and the International Convention for the elimination of all the forms of discrimination of 1965. These major principles are reaffirmed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 7 December 2000 and the Lisbon Treaty (signed 13 December 2007) amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community. Many European directives and national legislation on the subject should be emphasized, particularly regarding affirmative action (or positive discrimination).

Many national and international organizations have organized **actions for fighting discrimination, as well as for awareness-raising for and preventing discrimination**. The *"All equal all different'* campaign of the Council of Europe, launched back in 1995, aimed to

reinforce action against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance. The campaign sought to bring these people together and give extra momentum to the struggle against all forms of intolerance. Later, the «Say No to discrimination» aimed at fighting against discrimination, promoting dialogue. The *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* published by the Council of Europe in 2009 developed a range of orientations for the promotion of intercultural dialogue, of respect and mutual understanding, based on fundamental values of the Council of Europe. For many years, the Pestalozzi Programme has been following the same path and many training activities are organized on issues of intercultural Education and on Education for democratic citizenship, on the acceptance of diversity, etc...

3. Why do we need education for the prevention of discrimination?

There is an unprecedented distance between the daily reality of social discrimination and the impressive legal arsenal cited above as well as of the objectives of the actions undertaken by national and international organizations. The feeling of being discriminated against is widespread in our democratic societies[1]. It still manifests itself on the **intrapersonal level** (ex. : a member of the Roma community considers him or herself « not as good» as others and is already sketching his destiny, a woman thinks that her role as a mother is solely to take care of her children and therefore refrains from having a job…), **interpersonal** (ex. refusal to sit next to a person in public transportation because of the color of their skin, their ethnic origins, or of a handicap…), **intergroup** (ex. : intolerance and racism, difficulties for women to find "quality" employment in certain European countries, difficulty in finding housing or employment for the immigrants of " 2nd and 3rd generation", …), **institutional** (ex. : legal interdiction of the right to vote for certain social groups in certain elections, legal impossibility for HIV carriers to go to certain countries and the obligation to have a detection test before the journey…)… The educational domain has not been spared from issues of discrimination.

As opposed to the majority of actions undertaken up to today – actions that are more related to the management of discrimination **after** it has occurred, reactions to already observed phenomena – here, we will focus on *education for the prevention* of discrimination. Regarding education professionals, the objective is clearly to focus on the multiplier effect which these professionals have on the younger generations, by tackling the issue upstream, before discrimination happens, and by a reflective and critical look at societal practice they will contribute to making democracy live.

Our work on these issues is to be inscribed in a general framework. **No special emphasis will be given to any particular social group or community.**

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[1] According to a survey carried out from May to April 2009 in thirty European countries, approximately one European in six, 16 % of the population, claims to have been discriminated against or harassed on the basis of one of the motives examined in this study (gender, handicap, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion or convictions).

4. What are our specific objectives in the module series?

- Identify the principal concepts relative to the topic and reveal the mechanisms that generate them;
- Identify key development areas of discrimination in the context of Education;
- Identify the transversal attitudes, skills and knowledge (TASK) that need to be developed to prevent discrimination;
- Identify and outline participants'
- Create strategies to develop them TASKs for the prevention of discrimination
- Develop training activities for these competences (knowledge, attitudes, skills)
- Create and ensure cooperative work and networking;
- Pilot the aforementioned training activities.

The CORE project – a project of the Pestalozzi Programme - drafted, in 2009, a list of about 80 essential components (transversal attitudes, skills and knowledge) which are needed for a transversal approach to teacher education. Many of these components relate to our chief objectives:

Transversal Attitudes:

- I believe in Human rights and rule of law as the universal framework for living together
- I am convinced that sharing values of Human Rights, mutual understanding and democratic citizenship can influence people's attitudes and behaviours.
- I am convinced that learning and teaching processes should be based on equality and on the right to be different.
- I am willing to play an active role to prevent judgements, prejudices and stereotypes when working collaboratively
- I am aware of my own "world views" and their limitations and put them to question
- I accept suspension of judgment of others based on prejudice and stereotyping
- I am aware of the risk that harmful media content represents for young people (e.g., violent, racist, hate propaganda, pornography, hidden agenda of advertising, manipulation)

Learning to do: Skills and processes:

- I am able to identify explicit and implicit hostile attitudes towards people who are perceived as "different" and develop strategies to engage learners to actively oppose all types of discrimination in- and also outside of- the classroom to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups
- I am able to create a safe learning environment and develop my own and learners' self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence
- I am able to develop critical thinking skills in learners: encourage debating, discussing, listening and asking questions, to build constructive assertiveness

based on argumentation; teach about generalizations and their limitations, giving examples, establishing connections, coming to conclusions, finding causations

Learning to know: Knowledge and Understanding:

- I consider that knowledge is a mere construction that remains incomplete and subject to continuous questioning
- I know how to evaluate sources and recognize in these points of view, prejudice, bias, exactitude or reliability
- I have knowledge of the key concepts related to diversity and intercultural understanding (culture, identity, equality, prejudice, stereotype, discrimination, racism, etc.)
- I develop my knowledge and understanding of key international policies and standards (e.g. Human Rights Convention, Children's Rights convention, rights of minorities etc.), as well as the historical dimensions of human rights

5. **What are the challenges and resistances that we can predict?**

Among the concepts proposed in these modules, education for prevention will certainly be the most difficult to achieve: the educative world, still too rooted in knowledge, is aware of the difficulties of parting with the demonstrative approach. Thus, showing discrimination, as shocking as it may be, is it really enough to prevent it? In addition, as noted above, most existing measures focus on dealing with *discrimination* (management, control ...). We therefore chose to focus on strategies to *prevent discrimination*. One of the major challenges we might encounter during the module series is resistance to change on the part of education professionals:

- The ability of each participant to make and receive constructive feedback on their activities and communicate without threatening the other;

- The capacity to act, react and cooperate;

- The ability to listen to each other without being closed to change and development, accepting to receive others' views on the work produced

… are but a few of the issues we will have to consider. Another significant challenge will be to have an impact, not only on the personal practice of the participants, but also on the everyday practices of the member countries.

6. How can we overcome these challenges?

This module series should move beyond developing useful training materials and models for educational purposes in teaching training programs. Beyond that, it should set in motion a wide network of active participants and institutional partners building common communities of action in the field of prevention in education.

This CoE network for prevention shall be managed in a cooperative micro-group structure based on the given basic principles of cooperative learning as an effective structural model for developmental purposes. The same way cooperative learning structures enhance active participation in classroom situation, it should help us build a stronger and more active network of contributors from different member states.

During the modules A and B and the months between these modules, the participants, in small groups, will work interdependently. Everyone will find a specific role (s) to "play". Particular emphasis will be placed on each one's ability to formulate opinions, comments, criticisms in a constructive spirit and the ability to receive these opinions and comments.

Beyond the module series, the CoE will support participants who continue to cascade the programme locally and internationally and integrate them into its network of education professionals. Our goal together is to ensure that our programme has an impact on teacher education throughout the member states.