



BODY Culture, Body, Gender, Sexuality in Adult Trainings

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**Cultural differences in adult trainings related to  
HEALTH, GENDER, SEXUALITY, DISABILITY, BODY**

*Summary of critical incidents*

*November 2012*





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### 1. SCOPE OF THE WORK

The aim of the WP2 of the BODY project was to explore the impact of cultural differences in the work of adult trainers involved in trainings related to health, gender, sexuality, interculturality. The chosen method was to collect critical incidents experienced by adult educators / trainers involved in this field during their work following the approach developed by Margalit Cohen-Emerique. The advantage of this approach is that it acknowledges that in all cross-cultural conflict / tension there are two sides involved and that a conflict can never be reduced to or explained by the strangeness of the other, but rather the interaction of two differing cultural reference frames. The approach also offers us a possibility to uncover what further values, norms, practices and expectations lie behind culture shock incidents related to the body.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

We have adopted the methodology developed by Margalit Cohen-Emerique to the context of our project, i.e. to the BODY themes and also to the professional domain of adult trainers / educators. To identify, collect and analyse critical incidents we have organised fifteen exploratory workshop sessions through the five countries and a variety of bilateral interviews, involving almost 200 adult trainers. We have collected and analysed 88 critical incidents in the themes of health, disability, gender, sexuality and body in general, to explore how cultural diversity in these domains can become a sensitive zone and what competences they require from adult trainers.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS OF THE COLLECTION OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

#### a. RESULTS

A total of 122 critical incidents have been collected between February and July 2012, from professionals involved in adult education / accompaniment activities of a variety of fields including language training for foreigners, disability, international development, transgender support, health education etc. Of the 122 incidents collected thirty-four were discarded for their low relevance with the themes of the BODY project (either not focusing sufficiently on health, gender, sexuality, disability, body or not relevant for adult training).

The incidents were either collected through workshops or through individual interviews or the combination of the two.

#### b. CONCLUSIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY

The main conclusion of the WP2 experiment was that the Critical incident methodology – as developed by Margalit Cohen-Emerique can be well adapted to working with the themes of the BODY project, and is very much suited for such an exploratory research. The evaluation session at the closing of the work phase highlighted some strength and weaknesses of the method, in particular with respect to its efficiency, use for the target group. The table below summarizes our comments and observations.

## SWOT Analysis

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS
Concerning the adaptation of critical incidents to the BODY project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Novelty of the approach: few people outside of France are acquainted with it</li> <li>- Exploitable, multipliable : easy to integrate into the training tools, different kinds of trainings</li> <li>- Opens up the narrow conception of culture to include subcultures, professional cultures</li> <li>- Acknowledges the importance of emotions and the personal side and integrates them into the analysis</li> <li>- Acknowledges the importance of both sides in an interaction / conflict</li> <li>- The pictures exercise gives an easy introduction to the method, in an interactive way which was usually well appreciated by participants</li> <li>- It is practical and is oriented towards identifying solutions</li> <li>- Identify sensitive zones to work with</li> <li>- It has a clear structure</li> <li>- It is well adapted to the BODY issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If not properly done the method can maintain generalisations</li> <li>- If the incidents are not properly recorded they are difficult to work with as the narrators may change the narrative as they reconstruct it through the analysis</li> <li>- It is not adapted to too short work sessions : the acquisition of the method needs time, deepening the analysis needs time, finding the necessary background information to analyse the cases needs time, effort and knowledge</li> </ul>
	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Concerning the use of the outputs for trainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It has a great adaptability with different target groups</li> <li>- Has a big value added for integration in institutional frameworks, where it can shed light on the local institutional reference frame</li> <li>- It works well with a variety of minorities, is not restricted to some cultures</li> <li>- It is adapted for continuous work with the same group (in a supervision fashion) or can be used with short term groups</li> </ul>	<p>Trainers can easily use the outputs to gain awareness of the cultural diversity concerning the body, and to gain awareness of their own values, norms connected to body issues, but the outputs are not sufficient (nor is it their aim) to transfer the method of critical incidents to use with their own groups. The transfer of the method requires a specific training.</p> <p>Without proper training the risk is to create superficial analysis and reproduce stereotypes and generalisations instead of going beyond them.</p>

To benefit maximally from the strength and opportunities and to overcome the threats and weaknesses we have reformulated the original methodological guide.

#### 4. WHAT DID WE LEARN ON OUR THEMES?

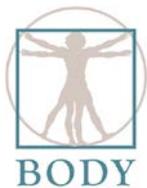
The table below illustrates the number of incidents gathered in the four themes of the BODY project: health, disability, gender, sexuality and body in general<sup>1</sup>.

	Belgium	Denmark	France	Hungary	Italy	TOTAL
Health		2	2	2	1	7
Disability	17		1	4	5	27
Gender		8	6	7	1	22
Sexuality	2 <sup>2</sup>	2	2	3	0	9
Body		3	15	2	3	23

It is important to note that these four themes are by no means independent from each other. In fact there are substantial overlaps: most sexuality issues are related to gender, disability is connected to health, etc. However we proposed this distribution as a means of simple orientation between body-related subject matters.

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<sup>1</sup>For the reason above two Belgian incidents are quoted under sexuality and disability as well



## CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN THE DOMAIN OF HEALTH

Quick summary of critical incidents related to health				
Belgium	Denmark	France	Hungary	Italy
	Accompanying death in the hospice	Water	Abortion	Sealed lips
	Babies wrapped up	Contraception	Drug habits	

Health is the theme where we collected the least incidents, only 7 from the five countries. With such a small number of cases it is difficult to identify any patterns. What we can say however is that all the incidents point to a particular direction worth to explore. The *Drug habits* (HU) situation questions how a family can deem acceptable the use of drugs, and support their daughter in this habit. The *Wrapped babies* (DK) situation is an example of cultural practices surrounding the handling and management of babies, and birth giving in general. The diversity in rituals and prescriptions abound concerning their freedom of choice (or its restrictions), the desire physical contact to maintain with them, the taboos and prescriptions concerning breastfeeding, and the sleeping habits just to name a few. *Sealed lips* (IT) brings the question of how can we understand if the meaning behind an action is in the situation, in culture or psychological state triggered by trauma. The incident entitled *Water* (FR) illustrates the debate between physical and spiritual needs: can a spiritual or religious prescription outweigh or have precedence over seemingly objective physical needs? Adjacent to this the *Abortion* (HU) incident opens the question of what can a therapist do when pregnancy seems socially, financially, psychologically challenging, yet abortion is forbidden by the religion. Similarly *Contraception* (FR) tackles the theme of contraception, which seems unacceptable from several religious positions. Finally, *Accompanying death in the hospice* (DK) gives an example of the rules that govern our behaviour facing illness or death.



IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN THE DOMAIN OF GENDER

Quick summary of critical incidents related to disability				
Belgium	Denmark	France	Hungary	Italy
	Little girl with make-up	Acculturation	Husband	The challenge
	Meeting at the Turkish home	Storytelling	Gendered grief	Introduction
	Homework café	Seduction	Women's role	
	Forearms	Dressing up	Men's role	
	Sexually dressed in exam	Theatre workshop	The proposal	
	Sexually provocative dress in library	Mixed playing	The woman trainer	
	Interruption	Transgender mirror	Overdressed participant	
	Lebanese father		Transgender authenticity	

A total of 22 incidents were collected in connection to gender issues (excluding those dealing with sexuality). Most of the incidents revolved around issues of separation of gendered roles: triggered by the fact that different cultures (national or even professional) prescribe different roles for women and men in a variety of domains of life, including everyday responsibilities, communication styles, dress codes.

- *Separation of gender roles.* It may be a widespread preconception in modern western societies the separation between gender roles tends to decrease. However, several incidents suggest that such differences may exist today not only in distant cultures. *Gendered grief (HU)* for instance points to gender differences when concerning expression of emotions and grief. The *Woman trainer (HU)* reveals the stereotypes and prejudice that a young woman had to overcome as trainer in the business sector.

- *Gender roles and hierarchy.* If the *Woman trainer (HU)* reveals a hierarchy existing in a professional culture, the incidents *Challenge (IT)* and *Lebanese father (DK)* reveal cultural positions where women are not supposed to occupy power positions, and in particular they are not supposed to be in power positions above men. In *Challenge (IT)* a young Palestinian student directly challenges a woman facilitator putting in doubt her competence explicitly because she is a woman.

- *Separation of roles in household.* *Husband, Women's role, Men's role (HU)* are three incidents whose protagonists are from Hungary's most important cultural minority group, Roma. The incidents reveal the clash between a preference towards a balanced, fairly symmetrical division of tasks and responsibilities and the expectation towards traditional division, or even a non-traditional, but still clear division of tasks. In all three situations the men are in the dominant situation, having power on their partner's autonomy, which is resented by the professionals representing a highly individualist culture.

- *Physical separation.* The division of gender roles is often marked by the clear demarcation of spaces for women and men. In *Theatre workshop (FR)* a French artist finds out that art workshops are not perceived as proper spaces for the African men living in the Parisian suburb. In *Meeting in the Turkish house (DK)* the narrator is shocked by discovering that the female audience is seated behind a curtain in

the cultural center. In Homework Café (DK) a 12 year old girl cannot benefit from educational resources because she 's not allowed to attend alone such a space, where boys are also present.

- *Femininity and children, young girls.* Children's socialisation into gender shows a great cultural diversity, as to when and how children should start to become "gendered". *Little girl with make-up* (DK) is the culture shock experience caused by a Palestinian mother bringing her three years old child to kindergarten wearing make-up. *Mixed playing* (FR) shows that in some Indian cultures the separation between boys and girls start very early. Finally, *Proposal* (HU) reveals the confusion of an educator asked for advice by a father whose 13 years old girl has been asked to marry into a Roma family. What is the right age to become woman, wife? To what extent is our conception of right age cultural?

- *To be gendered or not to be: issues of dress code.* If in some cultures there are clear prescriptions as to how women (and men should) be dressed in public (see *Forearm*, DK), several incidents lived by "natives" show how implicit expectations can create tension. In *Overdressed* (HU) a participant at a training is criticised for being too dressed up by her colleagues, while in *Sexually dressed in exam* (DK) and *Sexually provocative dress in library* (DK) are culture shocks between a preference for non-gendered dressing style and an explicit feminine dressing style preferred by some Bosnian women. All three cases testify of a search for how to handle and present femininity in the post-sexist societies: do all feminine dressing styles necessarily reflect internalised oppression?

- *Acculturation.* The incidents linked to dress codes already testify of difficulties to adjust for cultural preferences that are not clear and explicit. Nevertheless, several incidents reveal an expectation on behalf of western trainers and educators for the migrant women to embrace the western interpretation of gender equality and women's emancipation. Acculturation in particular shows the surprise of two women trainers when they meet women from Maghreb countries having lived more than ten years in France, without acculturating to the French models of women's roles.



## IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN THE DOMAIN OF SEXUALITY

Quick summary of critical incidents related to disability				
Belgium	Denmark	France	Hungary	Italy
Sleeping bag	Lesbian party	Nudity on stage	Lesbian privacy	
Satisfaction	Naked son in the garden	Transgender mirror	Coming out	
			Transgender authenticity	

We have collected nine incidents that were related to sexuality issues. They unveil sensitive zones of the separation of professional and personal life, issues linked to preconceptions, finally the question of taboos.

- *Separation of personal and professional spheres.* We had three incidents where the sexual position of the narrators became a source of conflict and tension. In *Lesbian privacy* (HU) and *Coming out* (HU) trainers who were themselves lesbian found themselves in situations where they felt compelled to come out, while at the same time for the sake of self-preservation and neutrality they usually put their own sexual orientation aside. In *Lesbian Party* (DK) the narrator finds herself involuntary deceiving a lesbian woman who interpreted their bonding far beyond the professional level and expected a sexual interest that the narrator could not reciprocate. *Nudity on stage* (FR) tells the story of an actor who has difficulties in performing a naked scene: his body remains well his body and not the professional body of the character.

- *Gender transitions, crossings.* Even if feminist studies have revealed long ago the socially constructed nature of gender, and true, that has been increasing freedom concerning how one lives, chooses one's gender, often there is still resistance – sometimes on a non conscious level – concerning gender transitions. In *Transgender* (HU) a psychologist working on gender issues catches herself addressing a transgender woman as “man” and perceiving her as “not convincing”. *Naked son in the garden* (DK) revolves around the difficulties of a Philippine father – and the staff of a Danish school as well, facing a young boy who likes to go to class with make-up and in women's shoes.

- *Taboos.* Sexuality is replete with taboos; in fact all societies regulate sexual behaviour by a wide range of prescriptions and prohibitions. The intimacy you are allowed to display in public usually has a clearly defined threshold. The *Sleeping bag* (BE) incident tells the story of breaking such a taboo where the protagonists are two men with mental handicap sharing a sleeping bag during an excursion. *Nudity on stage* (FR) touches the taboo of sexual behaviour of older people. Finally, the protagonist of *Satisfaction* (BE) breaks an even stronger taboo when she accepts to give sexual satisfaction to her handicapped son. A situation similar to the one depicted in the painting Roman Charity, which shows that the greatest generosity often implies going way beyond our own limits, and breaking our boundaries.



IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN THE DOMAIN OF DISABILITY

Quick summary of critical incidents related to disability				
Belgium	Denmark	France	Hungary	Italy
Trip		Finger	Kiss	Cooking lesson
Slap in the face			Touching	Theatre festival
Article			Martial arts	Icebreaking
Cooking			Beauty	Belly dance
Shopping				Bank
Aunt				
Guilty				
New year speech				
Restaurant				
Sleeping bag				
Toilet				
Party				
Cinema				
Transport				
Fair employer				
Living isolated				
Satisfaction				

We collected 27 incidents related to disability, out of which the majority (16) come from Belgium, where our partner organisation proposed workshops that focused specifically on disability. The cases offer a diversity of themes and situations, the most recurring being: the question of autonomy and reciprocity, representations of disability, issues of discrimination and inclusion, and finally taboos concerning intimacy and privacy.

- *Respect of autonomy* The incidents *Cooking lesson*, *Banking* (IT) and *Travel* (BE) revolve around the question of the autonomy of people living with disability. In all three situations, benevolent carers or observers assume that the handicapped person needs help to perform a certain action (whether it is crossing the street, participating in a cooking workshop or withdrawing money) and this takes them almost to perform the action instead of the handicapped person, who in fact were not in need of such support that is almost perceived as intrusion.

- *Reciprocity*: connected to issues of autonomy are those linked to the need of reciprocity – a powerful social rule in virtually all societies, regulating the equal engagement and respect of participants in an interaction. When people are restrained to the position of the permanent receiver, this takes away their opportunities to give back, thus to participate in the circle of reciprocity. It reinforces inequality, even when at the source it is a good willed, helping attitude (see the *Aunt*, BE).

- *Representation of handicap, of handicapped person*. Despite the (slowly) increasing integration of people living with disability, stereotypes and preconceptions still abound. Most of these

preconceptions are connected to our expectations of what a person with disability can or cannot do. What's more, even people whose daily work is connected to disability issues can possess some implicit attitudes, and when they suddenly surface they create embarrassment and shame, for instance in *new years speech* (BE), where the invited public speaker turns out to have a mutilation on her face, or in *theatre festival* (IT) where the narrator meets a theatre performer without arms. A strong preconception concerning connected to disability is the binomial opposition of *beauty* and handicap: what is handicapped cannot be normal and most of all cannot be beautiful. The incident *Beauty* (HU) tells the story of a woman who suddenly becomes aware of this powerful preconception when she finds herself admiring a young man who turns out to have a disability.

- *Discrimination, exclusion vs. integration.* Stereotypes sometimes give way to acts of *discrimination*, committed by more or less informed people with more or less intention. In the *Party* (BE) incident young people without disability ask the people with wheelchair to move away from the dance floor because they take too much space. Similarly in *Cinema* (BE) there are no wheelchair places in the theatre hall because they take too much space and thus reduce profits. The incidents *Article* (BE) and *Guilty* (BE) talk about persisting prejudice against people with disability. If there is consensus on the refusal of acts of discrimination, how to reach *inclusion and integration* is not evident at all. The situation *Icebreaking* (IT) points to the risks of trying to anticipate too much the particular needs. Indeed, the trainer conscious of the inclusion of a participant in wheelchair reworks her series of icebreakers so that it includes sitting exercises, with which she painfully points out to the person with the handicap. What amounts for good inclusion? Changing the whole programme in accordance with the (perceived) special needs? Or should it be something else?

- *Breaking taboos, rules of intimacy, privacy*
  - *Breaking taboos of intimacy and privacy:* a key element in cultural socialisation is learning the taboos, in particular the taboos in social behaviour and contact. In several incidents people with light mental disability disregard such taboos, by slightly crossing privacy boundaries eating from a stranger's plate (*Restaurant*, BE) engaging in intimate physical contact in public (*Sleeping bag*, BE) and wetting themselves in front of others (*Toilet*, BE).

- *Intimacy, crossing boundaries of professional and non-professional contact:* the incidents *Kiss* and *Touching* (HU) show that the disrespect of boundaries of physical intimacy can happen also with respect to the carer. In both situations the person with disability goes beyond the physical contact permitted by a professional helping relationship into personal intimacy.



IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN THE DOMAIN OF BODY

Quick summary of critical incidents related to disability				
Belgium	Denmark	France	Hungary	Italy
	Violent young refugees	The bag	Roma skirt	Private room
	Japanese handshake	Kisses	Japanese gesture	Hug
	Soup and butter	Touching art		Eating in class
		On the floor		
		Bottom		
		Japanese participant		
		Nodding		
		Swimming suit		
		Killing a bee		
		Silent students		
		Corporal punishment		
		Mixed role playing		
		Pakistani couple		
		Handshake		
	Nose blowing			

Amongst the collected incidents 23 were connected to body issues beyond gender, sexuality, health and disability. This section takes under scrutiny these remaining incidents with a view to identify the recurrent sensitive zones.

- *Non-verbal communication codes.* All communication is embodied but the body has different roles in the interaction according to different cultures. In cultures that put the emphasis on direct and verbal communication, the body is meant to accompany the verbal message, highlighting it, moderating it. However in more “context rich” (Hall) communication styles, the position, arrangement of the body, the mimes, the gestures can take precedence over the verbal message. Beyond their relative importance and role, the gestures themselves can be very different (see Japanese Gesture, HU). A particular moment in interaction where such differences often have a dramatic effect is the greeting / parting rituals (e.g. Japanese handshake, DK, Handshake, FR or Nodding FR). The reason for this lies precisely in the meaning of these rituals: to confirm a mutual recognition and respect. One partners’ inability to properly reciprocate the other’s gesture breaks the symmetry of the interaction, breaks the reciprocity. Narrators of such critical incidents often feel disrespected and consider the one that commits the mistake as rude.

- *Movements, rhythms.* The cultural differences in the repertoires of movements go beyond the gestures used in interactions (politeness codes, rituals etc.). In fact they may concern very mundane activities such as walking, or bending down to fetch a dropped object (Bottom, FR). Such

subtle differences can also become sources of misunderstanding and tension, because we automatically attribute intension to what we perceive as deviation from the “norm”. In Bottom (FR) for example the movement of bending down is interpreted as sensual, vulgar, while in Nodding (FR) the nod is understood as a wish to terminate interaction, whereas it was precisely the opposite: an encouragement to continue.

- *Privacy and integrity: the proper space of the individual.* A good deal of incidents are linked to differences in proxemics: the regulation of physical distance between people. This regulation tells us (without a conscious effort) what is the proper distance that we have to have with another person, taking into account our relationship. Usually intimate relationships allow smaller distance, while hierarchical relationships demand a larger distance. Breaking the rules of proxemics is usually interpreted as bad intention, either as aggression (for the one who stands too close) or dislike (for the one who stands too far). *Hug (IT)* is an incident where the rules of proxemics are topped with different prescriptions concerning physical contact: a British volunteer interprets the warm friendly hug of an Italian facilitator as invasive. Different proxemics and physical contact prescriptions can be alarming even when we are not personally involved. In *Violent young refugees (DK)* the narrator is shocked by the frequent and strong physical contact between the young men in the class. Similarly, witnessing *Corporal Punishment (FR)* is also often source of culture shock for Europeans, who cherish the physical integrity of individual as a primary value. A shift of formal and informal registers can also result in surprise and a feeling of threat. In *Swimming suit (FR)* for example, the French facilitator feels invaded by the request of a participant to borrow her swimming suit. Beyond concerns of hygiene, the intimacy that such a demand supposes does not correspond to their relationship.

- *Taboos.* Each culture draws lines to delineate behaviour considered polite and acceptable from rude. We have seen some of these prohibitions and taboos in the sections dedicated to gender and sexuality. But there are also taboos beyond those two domains. A good deal of such taboos concerns eating (see *Eating in class, IT*) and hygiene (e.g. *Blowing nose, FR*). All prohibitions have a certain validity field: in some spaces we are allowed to perform certain actions, which we are not allowed to elsewhere. When the default setup is different, then again we find interesting incidents: in *Touching Art (FR)* Chinese visitors did not take into account that in Europe there it is usually forbidden to touch works of art in museums. Similarly *On the floor (FR)* is an incident triggered by the “unusual” behaviour of Indian visitors who sit down on the floor in the middle of a museum room.

## 5. WHAT CROSS-CULTURAL CONCLUSIONS ON THE PROFESSION OF ADULT EDUCATION, WHAT COMPETENCES AND SKILLS FOR TRAINERS?

### a) BODY, HEALTH, DISABILITY, GENDER, SEXUALITY IN A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Our starting hypothesis that body, health, handicap, gender, sexuality can become sensitive zones in cross-cultural contact is well confirmed through our critical incidents: culture does matter in all these domains sometimes mistakenly considered universal. However we learnt more: we learnt that culture often does not matter in the way we expect it, that we as trainers are also subjects to surprise and shock and that we can easily become personally involved in culture shock experiences linked to these domains. Let's go one by one through these three conclusions.

A first conclusion to draw from our collection of critical incidents is that the range of incidents is much more coloured than much less predictable that could be expected based on the assumptions on different cultures: we have incidents in which Danish women experience culture shock because of the very feminine dressing style of some Muslim women. In another incident a French trainer is shocked by the very open way in which her Japanese superior and colleagues discuss and joke about her extra three kilos of weight according to her medical check-up. In a way the culture shock experiences do not respect our expectations as to what and who should shock us.

The second conclusion concerns the self-perception and expectations that trainers often have on their own openness and cultural flexibility. Indeed trainers – like everybody else – do rely on cognitive automatism in their daily functioning, and those include the mobilisation of stereotypes and preconceptions. Our own non-conscious preconceptions concerning beauty, handicap, or the values of western feminism immerse in situations where these conceptions are contested, confronted with other perspectives. Such experiences are all the more shocking when we were not aware of our preconceptions.

Culture shock experiences are always stronger than the mere surprise on a cultural pattern different from ours; they almost always inevitably become a self-shock, the questioning of our own values, norms, expectations very dear to us. In our collection of incidents we have found out that culture shocks connected to sexuality, gender, body, handicap, health are particularly likely to involve the narrators on a personal level.

### b) COMPETENCES FOR TRAINERS

The general intercultural competences needed for functioning as trainers, educators in culturally diverse settings have been fairly well defined. Focusing on our five themes allowed us to observe in more precision what are the skills, knowledge, attitudes that can be helpful in our BODY-related domains.

- *Between anticipating and ignoring difference: negotiating the right attitudes facing diversity*

There is no single rule pointing to the right direction concerning diversity. Our critical incidents showed us that sometimes it is trying too hard to adapt to particular needs that leads to a loss of autonomy, a loss of self-determination for the adults we work with (see for example *Icebreaker* (IT)). At every moment the trainer must negotiate to what extent s/he can target specific needs, without closing the participants in their specificities.

- *Listening and observing*

Without a general prescription the main resource at our disposal is observation, listening –sometimes limited to the non-verbal domain (see *Banking*, IT) if we work with people whose verbal expression skills are limited.

- *Expectations of acculturation*

Be it migrants or members of cultural minorities, the adaptation or acculturation process they go through is not automatic nor linear, nor complete. Even values, norms that to us may seem practical, true and “developed”, for others may seem undesirable or simply non attainable. In any case we cannot expect others to display fixed levels of acculturation even after lengthy immersion in a given cultural environment.

- *Preconceptions, implicit stereotypes*

Deconstructing stereotypes and preconceptions is hard work, and the end result would not bring a complete emancipation from preconceptions, rather the capacity to be aware of them. Trainers / educators working in diversity issues often assume they are through with preconceptions, and when certain situations bring those up (e.g. *Transgender* (HU), *New Years Speech* (BE)), the disappointment and self-blaming can be exhausting. Researchers have shown that preconceptions and stereotypes are “natural” cognitive phenomenon, automatisms. They operate without conscious effort, even in domains, which we do not suspect. To keep this in mind can prepare trainers to work through the stereotypes in the moment when they are activated.

- *Own identity, authenticity, separation of personal and professional life*

Revealing aspects of our own identity can be a resource in intercultural work. It can also contribute to the recognition or empowerment of particular identities (e.g. migrant or minority identities). At the same time the preservation of personal identities would encourage us to keep parts of our identities covered. Without any general objective recommendations, the most that can be said is to keep the options open to negotiate in each situation where that boundary should be drawn, what are the risks and what are the gains of lifting or moving those boundaries.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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