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Workshop: Similarity and diversity in Europe

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General outline

This paper reports on a workshop based on experience- and process-oriented concepts. The different tasks linked different personal experiences and enabled the participants to become aware of them (consciousness raising). The focus within the field 'European Identity' was on similarity as well as on diversity. The different tasks enabled the participants to speak about themselves and their experiences within given socio-cultural areas of life and life-style situations and to listen with an open mind to what others say and relate about theirs.

Presenting one's own experience and explaining it to others, defending one's own points of view – all these activities should facilitate dealing with one's own identity in a conscious way. Listening to other people's arguments and hearing them explained should enable each participant to deal with similarity and diversity.

The perceptions of individual participants were not discussed. Nobody had to defend themselves or justify their own opinion. The leader of the workshop, however, articulated opinions and asked for comments (but nobody was obliged to make a statement).

During the workshop participants were usually given explanations of theoretical concepts. Some terms were explained and references to literature made. Towards the end of the workshop there was time for reflection; the experience of each of the participant was discussed and compared with others. Similarities and diversities were stressed, the different experiences based on different life stories and the different socio-cultural circumstances underlined.

European identity is marked by similarity as well as by diversity in the field of one's own experience and is linked to one's manner of thinking, acting and behaviour. Raising conscious awareness of diversity and similarity in being European is an important aim of the workshop.

Aims

- To raise awareness of similarity and diversity in the field of European identity
- To link one's own experiences to one's way of thinking and acting
- To become aware that European identity is a process that involves thought and behaviour
- To become aware that it is necessary to connect theoretical inputs with one's own experience
- To compare these experiences with those of others
- To become emotionally engaged by means of a variety of tasks, not only cognitive ones
- To acquire a basic theoretical background (literature)

Greeting and introduction

- Paula Preradovic (1947) ('... Austria is right in the middle of the continent, like a strong heart'. Austrian national anthem; second stanza)
- 'Welcome to the heart of Europe' (a poster at Brussels Airport)
- The geographical centre of Europe lies in Slovakia (we learned in a CiCe conference)
- Maybe, some of you will also claim that your country or the city you live in is the centre of Europe.

Diversity-similarity issues

- I think it's best simply to feel European, no matter where you come from, where you live, what language you speak, and so on.
- What's common to all of us – Europeans – is that we all are similar while being diverse.
- I'll be trying to show you, or rather to make you aware of, these aspects of diversity, but on the other hand I'll be trying to elicit feelings of similarity.
- Similarity and diversity do not depend on the same social background, the same cultural roots, the same economic situation, the same level of education, and so on.

Literature

- G. H. Mead: *Concept of Symbolic Interactionism*
- L. Krappmann: *Four important abilities of personality: empathy, role-distance, ambiguity-tolerance, communication-skills*
- Iceberg-concept of culture – cultural awareness / consciousness / unconsciousness
- Constructivist Pedagogy

Workshop / Tasks

The different tasks presented in the workshop need time for their completion; sometimes only a few minutes, sometimes half an hour each. In the following list they are only briefly listed.

1. I come from ... :
 - My 'wanted' poster (A5)
 - Who am I? (name, job, hobbies)
 - Flag – name of the country – capital
 - And what is your typical food?
 - Where do you come from? What is characteristic of you and your home country?

What are other important geographical, cultural and historical characteristics?

Important – well-known national-cultural events, ...

2. Using only a sheet of paper (A4 pages; activity with discussion questions)

Task: Please *close your eyes*; now do the following:

Fold the paper in the middle / turn it upside down / fold it again down the middle / tear off the bottom right corner / turn it upside down / again tear off the bottom right corner / unfold the paper / put it in front of your eyes / and now open your eyes and have a look at the others.

Have you done the right / wrong things? What's your feeling when looking at the others' papers?

3. Introduction in small groups (four):

Please describe your identity, your origin / background and your culture in four terms:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

Now find another partner to compare your answers with. Please read out the four items you have put down to describe your identity, and explain them.

4. To which groups do you belong? (I belong to different groups):

(Sheet of paper (A5) with circles – each of them standing for one important group in everybody's life.)

- Please fill in the name of the groups you belong to (5 – 15). In the circle in the middle you may fill in the name of the group which is the most important to you.

After five minutes:

- Please stand up as soon as I have called out the name of a group you belong to. If it is the most important group to you, remain standing, if not please sit down after a short while. Please tell the others why you belong to this group and what the reasons are.

There may be time afterwards to discuss the results.

5. Cultural Perception

Find a person who knows the answer to the questions on the sheet. Put down her/his name on your sheet in the appropriate fields if he/she knows the answer to the question.

- People with different heritage have different cultural know-how.
- It is possible to acquire this knowledge by asking other people.

When all fields have been completed (or after 15 minutes), the participants take their places. Ask for the answers – try to find them with the whole group.

- What was the point of this task? (We often depend on mono-cultural learning; to answer questions like these, it is necessary to ask others (people from other cultures).

6. I'm a European:

Music, colour, picture/graphic/drawing; all participants are given a sheet with three circles on it. After a few minutes they may read out what they have described. Start with music and listen to all the answers given. Notice similarities; reflect on them; then go on.

7. Look at the list of cities and try to give the distance in km from Ljubljana: I'll write your answers on this board. Afterwards we'll check your answers against the real distances and find out some underlying reasons for errors in judgment.
8. Do you or do you not agree with the following statements?

I am going to read a statement; please find your 'point of view' along the line between the two extremes (plus / minus). Statements such as:

- human rights are fundamental in each society
- they should introduce the death penalty for terrorists
- democracy should be defended at all costs – even with violence
- 'to cut an animal's throat' is torture and should therefore be forbidden
- religious beliefs are a human right; everybody is free to choose their own religious beliefs.
- people have to adapt themselves, they cannot live their own lives

May I ask why you have chosen this point on the line? What is your opinion?

(We don't want to discuss our opinions; we only want to listen to the others. Sometimes I will draw your attention to an aspect I recognise from my own point of view.)

SWOT – Analysis

Diversity – Similarity

- (An A5 sheet with four fields. SWOT – (partner work); please put down your ideas. Each of you will get a sheet of paper with four fields. Each field represents one of four issues: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats.
- Each of you should find out and write down what comes to mind when thinking about diversity or similarity in Europe.
- After a few minutes find a partner with a differing opinion (diversity or similarity) and discuss your findings.
- (An overview on the board and a discussion may help to clarify differing points of views – if there is time).

Four corners

In each corner you can see a different picture (painting / print). Choose one of them and walk up to it. Afterwards you have to explain why you chose this picture (form, colour, shape, perspective, interpretation, artist, ...) Compare explanations with each other.

Form two circles

An inner circle and an outer circle, one inside the other. You will be given some questions. You will have only one minute to answer each question. The participants in the inner circle will start; the others will only listen at first. Then the participants of the outer circle may give their answers. There will be four questions altogether:

- If you had to draw a landscape – what would you draw?
- ‘I am a European’ – what does that mean to you?
- What European country do you like best (apart from your own)?
- Does Europe really need its own constitution?

Conclusion / reflection and discussion

Draw a picture of yourself showing us what you have learned about yourself in this workshop. Please explain briefly to the others what you have drawn.

Let me say thank you to you all of you for your participation and for the pleasant atmosphere. I hope that the tasks have helped to increase our awareness of similarity and diversity in Europe.

