

Intercultural Communication for Cpia with Erasmus Plus

Year 2019/2020.

During the two-year period 2018-19 and 2019-20 the consortium of Cpia Palermo², Messina and Enna-Caltanissetta implemented various mobility in Europe thanks to the Erasmus Plus project K104 'Sicily calls Europe: languages, new technologies, intercultural communication and social integration of migrants in the Cpia '. Among the implemented mobilities there was one that had as its object the theme of Interculturality and Intercultural Communication. A theme that is very present and consistent with the type of work that the teachers of the Cpia carry out. If effective communication is important as a means of achieving the educational and teaching objectives of all school's levels, it is even more so for the success of teaching in adult schools with the peculiarity of mostly foreign users.

Users while learning have to deal with a wide linguistic gap as well as with a 'cultural' one. A gap that does not only concern the students, but also the teachers who, are often linguistically unprepared (with reference to the knowledge of foreign languages).

Another common problem is the 'cultural' approach and the inability to welcome this kind of user. The lack of a common linguistic medium is in itself already a barrier that prevents correct communication. "If there is no "shared language" between the subjects who communicate, there is no communication; but since communication is not only established through

verbal language but is also realized at a non-verbal level, communication cannot be limited to the use of a common language. It is necessary to find common ways of understanding which can not be limited to language strictly speaking." This was stated by Professor Federica Mazzara in her speech for the seminar at Termini Imerese High School, during which she spoke about the theme of Intercultural Communication.

The seminar was held at the end of the mobility project last January in London and involved a group of teachers from the aforementioned Sicilian Cpia in a course on the topic of intercultural communication. The seminar brought together the various parties in order to exchange experiences and points of view. Professor Federica Mazzara, who teaches at the University of Westminster, was welcomed by the director Patrizia Graziano together with the teachers and students of the area. Mazzara's presentation was focused on the definition of "culture". "Today the concept of culture has changed - says Mazzara - everything is culture: language, values, behaviors, art and so on. Culture belongs to everyone, not a small elite. The concept of culture can be compared to an iceberg and we only see the tip. But there is also an invisible part that exists and that influences the visible part and is the one represented by our ideals, values, and often also stereotypes and prejudices."

"Cultural identity is what we think we are with respect to everything around us - continues prof. Mazzara -

the factors that influence this identity change over time and we all find ourselves constantly negotiating our socio-cultural identity according to the situation we find ourselves in. A fundamental aspect is how others 'see us' but we have little to no power on that.”

“We cannot talk about culture without talking about communication. Within the communicative act there must be shared messages, between at least two subjects (an issuer and a recipient), we must understand each other and there must be the intention to communicate! Communication includes both verbal and non-verbal languages and to understand ourselves in intercultural contexts it is necessary to make the effort to push the boundaries of our cultural bubble and imagine the world from the perspective of those who do not necessarily share our own ideals. Only by doing this we can discover the hidden and invisible part of the iceberg. It is a long and tiring path that requires a lot of dedication, but it is a necessary path to become competent communicators in intercultural contexts ”.

These concepts can help teachers reflect on the fact that every effort must be made to remove barriers such as stereotypes or even forms, often unconscious, of racism. And precisely on this issue, the London

training course that took place at Daniele Trevisan's Kairos Europe focused: "As a training body we have been offering the intercultural communication course since 2015 and over the years there has been an increasing number of requests for this course, in particular (but not only) from schools, training bodies and other organizations in the area of Mediterranean (Turkey, Greece, Spain, Italy, etc.). The main motivation to participate is the fact that many of these bodies, following the migratory influxes of the last few years, suddenly found themselves having to manage classes with an increasing number of students from different countries, with the consequent need of having to face changes in educational dynamics."

"For this reason - continues Trevisan - many teachers and operators of the sector have felt the need to train in the field of intercultural communication to improve the necessary skills to communicate more effectively with students and families from different countries and cultures. The United Kingdom (and London in particular) is considered to be a frontrunner in the field, being a place where people from more than 200 different countries have lived together for many years, where over 300 different languages are spoken and where all religions are professed freely."

The course also deals with various issues such as understanding the dynamics of different ethnic groups, breaking down prejudices, as well as dealing with specific issues in the educational sphere, using both formal and informal methods. The course also introduces a very important issue which is that of mental health: it is important to know the mental problems that migrants may have on arrival, recognize their symptoms, and propose appropriate solutions. Different specialized trainers presented new topics day by day: a mix of academics, researchers, trainers in school education or adults and practitioners in the field of intercultural communication. Furthermore, during the course, organizations or associations that offer training programs in line with the aim of the participants were involved.

“The course is constantly updated and new elements are proposed from time to time to take into account the changes occurring in society at international level”. During the course 'Building Intercultural Societies: The Art of Coming Together' the participants met trainers from several countries such as Irina Bormotova who has worked with the refugees for about twenty years, promoting their education and professional training.

Irina and her association help migrants to integrate into the London community offering 16 different programs such as English, cooking and gardening lessons. "Those who know English at a good level work with us in the reception phase - Bormotova tells us - helping those who have to face, like they have already done before, the delicate moment of integration in a country that is not their own".

“Another essential point of our training path was to notice that communication between social groups can be challenging for everyone, not only between foreign people. We all tend to catalogue other social groups and this is because it is useful for us to create 'social containers' that apparently give order to our reality. This should not lead us to stereotyping, otherwise there will be no communication. Stereotype is a rigid, fixed image, while on the contrary culture continuously evolves.”

“The stereotype - says Mazzara - is a mental representation, shared by a social group. It is a form of shortcut to define an unfamiliar situation in a generalized way. Stereotypes are always negative. We are all victims of stereotypes, for example of gender or class. This often leads to prejudice, that is again a premature, negative judgment.”

“In the social recognition phase our identity is shaped by an acknowledgment or a lack of it by other people and so the individual or group in case could suffer real damage. Usually a lack of recognition is due to ignorance. Moreover, when one social group feels superior to another, racism occurs”.

Professor Mazzara also remembered how little has been said in school about colonialism in the last years, a sad page in our history, too often forgotten and that should be taken up and deepened by our students in order to better understand certain social dynamics.

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