

In the light of current and future reality, the need to prepare each individual for a competent life and functioning in a multicultural and intercultural world becomes an essential aspect of the functioning of institutions at the global level. That is why it is often pointed out that in addition to action at the individual level, action on institutional structures and procedures is needed. For example, there must be a law to combat all manifestations of discrimination, hatred and intolerance, or public information campaigns on the social and personal consequences of intolerance and hatred must be implemented. All staff working in government bodies, public services and educational and civil society organizations should be trained in diversity and measures to promote intercultural dialogue, interaction and exchange both in the workplace and in the community. Despite interest in and commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, there are still significant variations in whether and how institutions define, understand, and respond to issues related to these constructs.

Diversity theoretical framework

An inclusive and supportive environment that fosters diversity in practice is based on several contemporary theoretical approaches and models: Bioecological Theory of Human Development; Relational Developmental System Perspective; Strength-based approach; The optimal distinctiveness model; Intergroup contact theory; Theory of Generative Interactions; Constrict theory; Socioemotional learning; Prosocial classroom model; Whole-school approach; Whole system approach, etc. Understanding the theoretical basis of diversity fostering allows us to frame our actions in scientific lines.

The bioecological model of human development represents a dynamic theoretical system for researching development over time while recognizing the complexity of interactions between subjective and objective environmental factors. In the latest version of the model, the authors introduce the concept of proximal processes that represent the transfer of exchange which takes place in the relationship between the individual and other people, objects and symbols in the immediate environment. They state: that for the purpose of development the person must be involved in the activity; for the activity to be effective it must take place regularly over a long period; processes important for development do not take place only in one direction, a certain level of reciprocity is needed in order for the exchange to take place; proximal processes do not only refer to interaction with people, but also with objects and symbols; intensification of proximal processes with the development of students' capacities and expansion of the circle of persons with whom they interact with age. Competence and dysfunction are distinguished as outcomes of proximal processes. An ecological systems perspective provides a conceptual lens that enables multicultural workers in social humanities to view diverse clients in the context of their transactions within and adaptations to various environments. The ecological systems perspective gives attention not only the physical space or geographic location but also the broader sociopolitical context that shapes the mental, physical, and social functioning of diverse individuals.

The perspective of relational development systems is based on four components: change and relative plasticity; relationalism and integration of the organizational level; historical foundation and temporality; and the limits of generalization, diversity, and individual differences. The change and relative plasticity of developmental systems emphasizes the focus on developmental change, where the potential for change exists. This focus is necessitated by the belief that the potential for change exists across the lifespan and the multiple levels of organization that make up the human ecology. These levels range from biological, through individual/psychological and proximal social relationships (eg, involving dyadic relationships, peer groups, and more), to the sociocultural macro level. Relational developmental systems theory goes beyond the simplistic division into sources of development in variables or processes related to nature and nurture; they see the multiple levels of organization that exist within the ecology of human development as part of an inextricably linked developmental system. All levels of organization within the development system are integrated with historical changes, where history as a level of organization, although continuously merged with all other levels, represents the broadest framework of the system. Something that at one historical moment is recognized as important for the relations between the levels of the system of human development at another moment may be completely insignificant. Individual differences inevitably result from the action of the developmental system, they shift the system in a way that further nurtures diversity, making individuals at the same time similar to other people and unique (like no other person).

The optimal distinctiveness model points to the two opposing needs of human beings for self-concept and social belonging. On the one hand, there is a need for assimilation and inclusion, and on the other for differentiation. As inclusiveness increases, the need for differentiation is activated and vice versa, as inclusiveness decreases, the need for differentiation decreases, but the need for belonging is activated. Competing needs thus keep each other in check, ensuring that interests at one level are not sacrificed for another. According to the optimal diversity model, two opposing motives produce the ability to socially identify with special groups that simultaneously satisfy both needs.

The main mechanism of the **Intergroup contact theory** is the development of a preference for persons or objects with greater exposure. Factors recognized as important for optimal contact when formulating the theory are: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, authority support and clear rules are favorable, but not necessary conditions. With more intergroup contact, there is greater trust and interpersonal relationships. These contact effects concern not only ethnic groups, but also other groups such as homosexuals, the disabled and the mentally ill. Furthermore, these effects tend to generalize beyond the immediate outgroup members in the situation to the entire outgroup, other situations, and even other outgroups not involved in the contact. Also, the theory emphasizes the universality of the achieved effects - among peoples, genders and age groups. In order to look at new findings in the theory and research of intergroup contact, a meta-analysis was conducted in which 515 studies were processed and with more than 250,000 respondents, which showed that intergroup contact reduces prejudice. The main mediators of the effect are fundamentally affective:

reduced anxiety and empathy. Even indirect contact reduces prejudice – indirect contact through mass media. Some of the shortcomings of the theory concern, for example, the greater sense of deprivation of the minority population, which, with greater contact with the majority population, realizes how deprived it is, which has a positive side because, in this way, the capacity of minorities to fight for human rights increases. Research findings suggest that greater interethnic contact may foster greater segregation.

Generative Interactions Theory suggests that in order to facilitate inclusion, multiple types of exclusionary dynamics (self-segregation, fear of communication, stereotyping, and stigmatization) must be overcome through adaptive cognitive processing and skill development, and engagement in positive interactions must occur to facilitate inclusion created and sustained by contextually relevant sets of organizational practices. Organizational practices provide the following conditions for generative interactions: pursuing an important, shared organizational purpose, frequently mixing different members over long periods of time, allowing different groups to have equal status and insider status in contributing to success, and ensuring cooperative interdependence, interpersonal comfort and self-efficacy, equity for individuals and groups in the organization. Inclusion is shown as adaptive contact, contact that stimulates generativity for group members through continuous interaction that leads to the reduction of prejudices and the development of skills.

Constrict theory is based on the observation that greater ethnic diversity in a certain context does not result in more relationships, whether conflictual or friendly, but in general with fewer relationships. According to the constrictive theory, the distinction between minority and ethnic majority groups within the context is not relevant. Individuals withdraw, regardless of the group they belong to, which the author of the theory empirically confirmed at the community level. The research conducted by a group of authors testing the theory in the school context, in order to examine whether ethnic diversity brings fewer and less quality friendships among students in a sample of 85 secondary schools, confirmed that ethnic diversity generally brings less friendship and less attachment to friends. A more detailed analysis found that lower socioeconomic status, and not ethnic diversity, actually contributes to a lower number and quality of friendships. However, for the minority population of students, greater ethnic diversity brings more friends and greater attachment to friends, where in the context of the tendency for assimilation, students of minority (Turkish, Moroccan) ethnicity unite around the exchange of resources they need to better fit into the majority Flemish population. The constrictive theory was rejected at the school and community level in a sample of Dutch high school students.