

Key factors for embracing diversity on the organizational level

Contemporary literature findings, focused on whole-organization level functioning, derived 3 key constructs that affect diversity fostering in practice. Those are organizational climate, organizational culture and cultural competences of organizations' personnel. The main focus of this knowledge collection is to provide managers and practitioners that work with young people in the sectors of education, youth work and social care with contemporary findings on how different elements of their organizations' culture, climate and staff competences should be organized in order to foster diversity in practice – to the fullest. Following chapters will focus on these 3 key constructs, providing you with findings from scientific literature from our 3 sectors of interest – youth work, education and social care. However, education has a lot more literature than the other two sectors, so this publication will try to support other forms of organizations to “take” for themselves lessons learned in the education setting (as the most researched context for diversity fostering).

The main idea is understanding the complexity of interactions that happen between the organisations' policies, governance, climate between all staff member and their youth users, and how all this affects diversity fostering in practice – in contact with diverse youth.

This approach is based on various ecosystem frameworks, emphasizing the idea of providing a holistic model of the complex network that affects every child and young person that encounters the institution/organisation. It emphasizes the need to acknowledge various factors from micro, meso, exo and macrosystems that co-exist and influence each other. Macrosystem implies a wider social, cultural and legislative context that shapes all other systems. The exosystem refers to the community context, that is, to building relationships with others in the community (other institutions/organizations, parents, other sectors, etc.). The meso-level refers to the institution/organization and the interactions that affect its structure, processes and practices, i.e. tradition, culture and ethos, values and ideology, authority and cooperation within the institution/organization. The micro level includes practices that directly affect young people, their development, and outcomes. It is precisely at this level that the competence of workers to respond adequately to the needs of young people comes to the fore.

Organizational culture that embraces diversity

Most of the work on defining organizational culture came from the business sector. In our fields, education has the most to say on this matter, so we will start the introduction to the construct of organizational culture in the social humanities field by introducing school culture.

Sociologists recognized the importance of school culture in the 30s of the 20th century. The origin of the use of the term "culture" to describe life in schools began

with Waller (1932), who noted that schools have their own identity, with complex rituals, a set of folk customs, traditions and moral codes. However, despite the general agreement on the importance of the culture of the institution, this construct is not easy to define, and there is an enormous number of different definitions, the number of which is continuously growing. Different authors agree that, at the end of the 20th century, there is no single universally accepted best definition of school culture. It seems that the biggest dilemma in the literature is the difference in defining culture and climate elements. It often happens that these terms are used interchangeably. Differences between climate and culture are highlighted in organizational studies, so that climate often refers to the behavioral aspect, that is, behavior, while culture is seen as the values and norms of a school or other form of organization.

When we sum up the literature on organizational culture, we can say that the culture of the institution/organization determines the correct way of behavior within it. It consists of shared beliefs and values established by leaders, then communicated and emphasized within the institution/organization, ultimately shaping employee perceptions, understandings, and behaviors. When the mentioned elements of the culture in the institution/organization are inconsistent or incongruent, things will not function adequately.

Lessons learned from youth work, education and social care literature:

◆ The **basic elements** of culture that fosters diversity include: a shared sense of purpose and vision; norms, values, beliefs and assumptions; rituals, traditions and ceremonies; history; people and relationships; architecture, artifacts and symbols. Each of these elements should reflect an appreciation of diversity. Culture influences and shapes the way educators, young people and other staff members think, behave and feel, and directs focus on what is important.

◆ The **characteristics** of a positive organizational culture are: shared mission and vision, collaborative culture, joint problem solving, continuous improvement. A positive organisational culture enhances motivation, efficiency and productivity, collegiality, communication, problem solving, innovation, commitment, energy, vitality, and trust among staff members, young people, and the community.

◆ Organisational culture should have an intercultural and inclusive **philosophy**, a positive view of diversity, high expectations for their users and their families, and a central principle related to community participation. An inclusive culture involves creating a safe, kind, collaborative and stimulating community where everyone is valued and which provides a foundation for all young people to achieve higher levels of achievement.

◆ Inclusive organisational culture is focused on the transformation of culture that increases **access** to all young people (not only inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups), improves the ability of organisational staff and users to accept

all young people, maximizes youth participation in various activities, improves the achievements of all young people involved. In organisations/institutions with an inclusive culture, there is some consensus among adults about the value of respecting differences and a commitment to offering all young people learning opportunities.

◆ An inclusive culture requires a **shared set of assumptions and beliefs** among policy makers and organisations/institutions staff that value differences, believe in collaboration, and are committed to all young people. When different elements of culture (beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations, ideas and behaviors) in an institution are inconsistent or incongruent things will not function adequately.

◆ **Organisations' leaders** have a key role in implementing inclusive policies and practices and especially in creating a culture that celebrates diversity. When leadership fails to do something proactive to enable equity and social justice, it often becomes an unwritten endorsement of inequality. It is for these reasons that organizational functioning researchers have long suggested that paying attention to culture is the most important aspect of leadership. There is considerable evidence in the literature to suggest that organisations' top management – principals/ directors/ leaders must first understand organisational culture in order to implement certain reforms. Successful leaders understand the critical role organizational culture plays in developing a successful organisation.

◆ Organisations' leaders have an obligation to create a safe and culturally sensitive organisational environment. This means that they influence the program, approach, organization of the institution (use of space, grouping of young people, etc.) and the development of cooperation with parents (if relevant) and the wider local community. For this reason, providing **professional development** of leaders in terms of improving their intercultural competence is the first important step in establishing positive leadership models for diversity in and among organisations/institutions.

◆ While top management (leaders) play an important role in setting the framework for a organisational culture that embraces diversity and promotes inclusion, the role of educators or other staff that work directly with youth is increasingly recognized as an essential aspect of successful improvement initiatives. A review of the literature shows that the **training of educators** and other relevant actors are important for the successful implementation of inclusion in different organisations and different sectors.

◆ Some authors use the term "comprehensive school reform" to describe the process of **"reculturing"** schools to make them more effective and inclusive. Key aspects of this reform include developing a culture of collaboration, using high-quality professional development to improve educator practice, and using strong leadership teams to support school improvement activities.

◆ Particular importance for the appreciation of diversity in the school environment is attached to the **curriculum**. There are usually three types of curricula that play

a role in fostering respect for cultural diversity, namely: formal curricula (followed by textbooks and curriculum guides issued mainly by government organizations) symbolic curriculum (pictures, symbols, rewards, celebrations and other artifacts displayed in the school); and social curriculum (knowledge, ideas, and impressions about different cultural groups portrayed in mass media).

◆ Therefore, young people need **teaching materials** that match their cultural background. These materials should improve young persons' self-concept, increase their interest in learning, and provide examples, vocabulary, and models related to their cultural backgrounds. Also, the main focus of any formal or non-formal learning curriculum should be on analytical and critical thinking skills, and materials, activities, and experiences should be authentic and multidimensional to help young people understand ethnic differences and cultural diversity.

◆ In social care, discussions are made on understanding the importance of the organizational culture for the overall diversity fostering in practice. Different authors point that an understanding of cultural competence that is reduced to interactions between social workers and clients will unavoidably obscure the fact that these interactions also are structured through a host of ideas and values that are produced in policies, organizational arrangements and the physical environment. The necessity for a **power perspective** and the need to ask questions about inclusion and exclusion in relation to the institutions are emphasized. So, effective cultural competence practice shouldn't be the responsibility of just social workers.

◆ From social care literature, an example of three models of **multicultural social care organizational development** was derived: monocultural, antidiscriminative and multicultural organizations.

Monocultural organizations. At one extreme are organizations that are primarily Eurocentric and ethnocentric. The following premises and practices are typical of a monocultural organization:

- There is an implicit or explicit exclusion of people of color, women, and other oppressed groups.
- The organization is rigged to the advantage of the dominant majority.
- There is only one best way to deliver health care, manage, teach, or administrate.
- Culture does not influence management, mental health, or education.
- Clients, workers, or students should assimilate.
- Culture-specific ways of doing things are neither recognized nor valued. Everyone should be treated the same.
- There is strong belief in the melting pot concept.

Nondiscriminatory organizations. As organizations become more culturally aware and enlightened, they enter this stage. The following premises and practices characterize a nondiscriminatory organization:

- The organization has inconsistent policies and practices in regard to multicultural issues.

- Certain departments or mental health practitioners, managers, or educators are becoming sensitive to multicultural issues, but these are not an organizational priority.
- Leadership may recognize the need for some action, but leaders lack a systematic program or policy addressing the issue of prejudice and bias.
- There is an attempt to make the climate or services of the organization less hostile or more culturally sensitive, but these changes are superficial and often made without conviction.
- Equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, and numerical symmetry of people of color and women are implemented grudgingly.

Multicultural organizations. As organizations become progressively more multicultural, they begin to value diversity and evidence continuing attempts to accommodate ongoing cultural change. A multicultural organization:

- Is in the process of working on a vision that reflects multiculturalism.
- Reflects the contributions of diverse cultural and social groups in its mission, operations, products, and/or services.
- Values diversity (does not simply tolerate it) and views it as an asset.
- Actively engages in visioning, planning, and problem-solving activities that allow for equal access and opportunity.
- Realizes that equal access and opportunity are not equal treatment.
- Works to diversify the environment.

◆ Youth work advocates that young people have **equal access** to community resources. Professional youth work itself should be an inclusive practice in which young people of different origins meet and together develop democratic ways of dealing with diversity. Being based on universal values regarding human rights, democracy, peace, anti-racism, cultural diversity, solidarity, equality and sustainable development, youth work should always:

- promote social participation and responsibility, voluntary engagement and active citizenship,
- strengthen community and civil society building at all levels (e.g. intergenerational and intercultural dialogue),
- contribute to the development of youth creativity, cultural and social awareness, entrepreneurship and innovation,
- provide opportunities for social inclusion of all children and young people,
- reach out to youth with fewer opportunities through various methods that are flexible and quickly adaptable.

◆ Respect for diversity is the cornerstone of holistic youth work. In other words, by **respecting the complexity of the individual**, space is given to young people to be who they are. Focusing on lifestyles, life choices, life management, peer group cultures, “culture of being young”, adapting to multiculturalism in society, interdisciplinarity, etc. instead of subcultures, marginalization or specific targeted services etc. resulted in the creation of the so-called “cultural youth work”.

◆ Youth work creates opportunities for social inclusion of different young people and represents a suitable context for testing **multicultural policies**. That is, young

people who participate in youth work activities are not just users of those services – they are future citizens who need to be educated for active citizenship.

◆ To successfully serve all people, organizations need to develop **standards, policies, and practices** within appropriate cultural frameworks. Policies are directed towards inclusion, access to rights and activities, describe the responsibility of the community for inclusion. In order to provide relevant programs for all youth – and especially for youth from minority cultural groups – local program leadership should consider ways to diversify and expand program modalities to meet the needs of all. **Knowing the needs** of different groups can provide critical information about constraints that may affect program participation (eg, transportation, family/work structure, costs), as well as potential topics for project areas that are meaningful to certain cultural groups.

◆ In youth work, there is often a tendency to offer young people programs and services that treat them as a homogeneous group, without **respecting individual characteristics** and needs. For example, organizers of recreational and leisure activities often inadequately address various elements of one's cultural affiliation, such as value orientation, ethnic identity, social capital, issues of biculturalism, language and acculturation, religious beliefs, and family structure. Therefore, the need to understand that many young people, especially those belonging to minority ethnic groups, are affected by poverty, are geographically isolated, live in disorderly neighborhoods with a lot of violence and crime, etc., which is reflected in the lack of adequate programs and services.

◆ Organisations and institutions that work with youth should strive for specific **values** that reflect respect for diversity, and refer to:

- recognition of culture as the predominant factor in shaping behavior and values;
- understanding when the values of the dominant mainstream groups are in conflict with the values of different cultural groups;
- respecting the culturally defined needs of a certain community;
- recognizing and accepting that cultural differences exist and affect the way services are provided and received;
- understanding the role of natural systems (e.g., family, community) as primary mechanisms for individual support and development;
- recognition that concepts of individual, family and community may differ among cultural groups;
- respecting cultural preferences that value the process more than the product, as well as harmony and balance in life in relation to achievement; and
- recognition that members of different cultural groups must be at least bicultural in order to cope with the dominant society, which in turn creates its own set of emotional and behavioral problems.

◆ When creating a program for leisure activities, it is necessary to respect certain principles, such as encouraging the engagement of young people who belong to **culturally different groups** (develop awareness and interest in recreational programs among young people of different ethnic groups; organize group

participation in activities, so that "different" young people do not feel isolated; organize different types of programs and the way they are implemented, so that they are adapted to the cultural affiliation of young people).

Organizational climate that embraces diversity

Organizational climate may be defined as the shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to the policies, practices, and procedures employees experience and the behaviors they observe getting rewarded and that are supported and expected. Institutions'/organizations' climate includes the feelings and current tone of the institution/organization, the emotional aspect of relationships, and morals. It represents opportunities for young people to learn about different cultures, norms and values, which is important for preventing discrimination, exclusion, prejudice, stereotypes and racism and promoting and encouraging interactions between young people from different cultures.

Disrespect for diversity in one institution/organization is often a reflection of its climate. The climate is the result of the interaction of elements of the institutions'/organizations' culture with specific people (with all their characteristics and competencies) who work in it and those who learn and develop in it. Therefore, the climate as an indicator can also point to the shortcomings in the hypothetically high-quality "set" organizational culture or to the lack of competence of the organizations' staff who fail to convey the benefits of a positive culture through their interaction with young people. Organizations must establish an empowering climate and make clear their disapproval of social inequality and injustice. If the climate is such that there is empowerment and cooperation, the presence of actions that indicate disrespect for diversity will be minimized. If the climate sends a message to one group that it is better than another, no matter how subtly, seeds of discord are necessarily created. When there is an atmosphere of positive relationships between staff members, a good level of communication, an administration that supports those who work directly with young people and a proactive and participative manager with an inclusive philosophy, a positive learning environment will prevail and a sense of belonging and appreciation of the institutions'/organization will develop among young people and the organizations' staff.

The following are identified as the main characteristics of an ideal climate for learning and work: inclusiveness and belonging; diversity; respect; physical, emotional and psychological safety; openness and freedom of expression, asking questions, taking risks and making mistakes without judgment; adequate mentoring to encourage learning and career development. A climate that respects diversity in the classroom, or youth club, or social service provider is of great importance for positive youth developmental outcomes.

Culturally diverse environments are not only diverse in the sense that young people are different from one another, but each young person brings different socio-cultural dimensions as part of their individual identity. The cultural diversity climate is a type of environment that reflects the way in which cultural diversity is dealt with at the institution/organization. Structural diversity (for example, ethnic

composition) and cultural diversity are two different concepts, with different effects on youth outcomes and are considered separately.

When the climate does not value diversity and sees it as an obstacle, young people experience frequent forms of discrimination and peer violence, feel rejected, have a weak sense of belonging and feel alienated. Various authors often call the role of school climate in the prevention of peer violence and discrimination "critical".

Research shows that students of minority ethnic origin achieve worse academic results compared to students of the majority population, show poorer knowledge in mathematics and poorer reading literacy, and are more likely to repeat a grade. In addition, students of minority ethnic origin feel a weaker sense of belonging to school compared to other students. Research results indicate that the psychological well-being of students of emigrant origin differs by country of origin, country of destination, as well as by how well schools and local communities in the country of destination help students overcome expected obstacles in school and other areas of life. With age, minority ethnic students are at greater risk of discrimination, educator rejection. Research findings indicate that female students compared to male students have better relationships with educators regardless of whether they belong to the minority or majority population. Researchers suggest that a lack of multicultural education leads to greater peer violence, discrimination, prejudice, and other forms of victimization.

Based on the analysis of the model of the connection between the school culturally diversity climate and student outcomes (achievement, academic self-confidence and life satisfaction) through the mediation of the sense of belonging to the school, at the individual level and at the level of the department, positive significant relationships and the presumed mediation of the sense of belonging to the school are observed. The study involved 1,971 students (61% emigrants) in 88 culturally diverse classes in southwestern Germany after their first year of high school. The key finding of this research is that there were no differences in the effects of a diversity-nurturing school climate on student outcomes in multi-ethnic schools regardless of ethnicity. This points to the conclusion that the effective management of diversity in school is beneficial for all students.

The results of a longitudinal research study in which the impact of different approaches to cultural diversity in schools on the achievement and sense of belonging among students of minority and majority populations was examined, point to the conclusion that approaches that value cultural diversity have a much greater perspective in terms of measured outcomes among students. However, it can be found that although the majority population of students generally "benefits" from a climate of respect for diversity, they report a mediocre quality of relations with educators, with the suspicion that certain teaching practices in schools that value cultural pluralism make students of the majority population feel excluded. The sense of belonging to the school

represents the level to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment.

Research results indicate that a climate of nurturing practices of equal treatment and inclusion has positive results on typically measured student outcomes. Moreover, research findings indicate that the practice of treating all students equally in the classroom can mitigate negative impacts such as discrimination and others. In a sample of 47 multi-ethnic schools in Belgium with a focus on students of Moroccan and Turkish origin, it was determined that the perception of discrimination at school predicts lower achievement, while the perception of equal treatment of students at school mitigates the negative effects of discrimination. On a sample of 1,875 adolescents of the majority Belgian population and 1,445 students of Turkish and Moroccan ethnicity, it was determined that the perceptions of students and educators about equality and multiculturalism enabled, and rejection or assimilation threatened, normative-positive trajectories for the minority student population. Better academic outcomes have been recorded for minority students with a climate of equality and inclusion. An inclusive, equity-based approach helps both majority and minority student populations to establish and maintain positive relationships with educators. Interestingly, educators' perceptions of multiculturalism and assimilationism affected the trajectories of minority and majority student populations differently. When educators perceived schools as more multicultural and less assimilationist, minority students were more likely, and ethnic majority students less likely, to form good relationships with their educators. On the other hand, the majority student population seems to benefit more from assimilationism than multiculturalism, given that it is not perceived by the ethnic majority student population as an approach that is inclusive for all. Good relationships with educators have been shown to be protective for minority student populations in terms of behavioral problems such as disruptive behavior and poor engagement in school (data from 2021).

Lessons learned from youth work, education and social care:

- ◆ The way an organisation manages diversity and the **quality of interpersonal relationships** are considered key to a positive organisational climate. Acceptance and care by adults, especially educators or other staff working directly with youth, is recognized as a central aspect of organisational support to young people. Educators are recognized as potential promoters of a positive climate of diversity in their organisations/institutions.
- ◆ In order for a staff member to be a promoter of diversity, apart from being expected to have a positive attitude towards youth from different cultural backgrounds, he/she should create a **positive atmosphere** in the activities and get to know the diverse needs of young people that attend them.
- ◆ Optimal results in multicultural groups depend on several important factors, which

- include monitoring and managing young peoples' behavior, creating positive educator-young person (and peer) relationships, teaching that engages youth and is open to their attitudes, as well as the educator's **specific knowledge of multiculturalism**.

The results of the Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS) (2019) study in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) suggest that if the educator is generally competent and their experience is that they can handle most typical classroom situations (general self-efficacy), they will cope better in a multicultural environment and will consider themselves able to cope adequately with such circumstances. The age of educators was not found to be significant for this relationship, except in Finland where increased age (and thus experience) has a positive effect. However, the total experience of the educator has a negative effect on the "multicultural self-efficacy" of the educator. The author of the report interprets this not-so-expected result as a result of lower self-efficacy in handling multicultural classrooms, as their experience might not be greater than the one of younger colleagues.

A research conducted at two points on a sample of 186 (majority) Dutch students, and 129 students with Turkish-Dutch or Moroccan-Dutch (minority) background in 29 classrooms from 4th to 6th grade aimed to examine to what extent student ethnic group attitudes are influenced by educators' perceived positive norms about cultural diversity, along with perceived positive educator-student interactions that can serve as role models for students. The results showed that both majority and minority students expressed more positive attitudes towards different ethnic groups when they perceived that their educator had a positive relationship with their classmates, only when this was supported by the educator's positive multicultural norms.

- ◆ Researchers point to the role of the **educator as a leader** who makes minorities more visible, who encourages interaction between groups, including parents, has a proactive role in approaching parents of the minority youth population instead of a policy of "blaming the minority", offers support in overcoming problems as a result of "learned helplessness" of the minority population.
- ◆ Educators have an important role in modeling respectful behavior and establishing prosocial norms in the classroom. Through their behavior, they promote a sense of **security** and influence the group climate.

Students' poor peer relationships, in terms of victimization and loneliness at school (measured by items such as "I have no one to hang out with at school"), were associated with their intentions to drop out, and the links between loneliness and intentions to drop out were significantly stronger for the group of immigrants than for the group of native students (data from 2021).

- ◆ Also, in culturally diverse groups, there is a tendency for educators to notice that students communicate more with peers of a similar cultural affiliation during breaks and informal gatherings. Given that the experience of lack of acceptance,

interaction and friendship can lead to feelings of alienation, it is important for educators to encourage group work and initiate projects in which young persons of different cultural affiliations cooperate with each other. **Shared engagement** encourages youth to accept and value each other.

◆ As a group leader, the educator is in a unique position to develop relationships with students and to stimulate relationships among them. Establishing **clear norms**, rules of behavior and consequences for violating them is part of building a relationship of **mutual trust**, which can prevent peer violence and exclusion.

◆ To be culturally responsive, educators themselves must be part of a **supportive environment**. The importance of support also suggests that organisations/institutions should provide their staff with the resources and tools to create a supportive environment.

A study published in 2021 shows that there can be challenges in creating stable relationships to promote student interactions and friendships. To address these challenges, educators need more knowledge about developing cross-cultural friendships and strategies to promote relationships between students. Educator-student collaboration is necessary to promote positive relationships, engagement, and learning among students.

◆ Positive interactions with diverse peers allow young people to gain insight into **different ways of thinking**, communication styles, and problem solving. A positive and inclusive climate is fruitful for both students and educators, especially in the domain of job satisfaction.

◆ Literature shows us **that perceptions of fairness** (such as discrimination or preferential treatment in hiring and promotion procedures) of people working with youth is an important organizational element that support the diversity climate.

Social workers often reported working with other professionals in their organizations – social workers and nonsocial workers whose assumptions, biases, prejudices, and stereotypes about their clients have been offensive and discriminatory.

◆ Understanding the way educators in different fields should implement their programs and activities allows them to foster the diversity climate in their organizations and their contact with youth. In their everyday work fostering **ethical principles** of equality, respecting diversity and accountability are the main components of the climate that is welcoming, secure and supportive to all.

Competences that embrace diversity

The cultural complexity of society leads to the necessity of developing a set of skills and knowledge for successful functioning in an intercultural society. These

skills include creative and critical thinking, cultural competence, and social and global awareness. It is emphasized that improving cultural competence is key to solving the challenges that modern society faces, such as intolerance, prejudice, hate speech, discrimination and violence.

Cultural competence is an important component of social culture, which enables effective interaction with people belonging to different cultural groups based on the understanding of different cultural heritage. The concept of "cultural competence" was developed on the basis of decades of research into intercultural communication and cross-cultural psychology within the framework of the study of organizational culture constructs. Cultural competence is defined as a set of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge that are needed to understand and respect, as well as establish positive and constructive relationships with those who are perceived as culturally different. As defined by some authors, intercultural/transcultural competence is conceived as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's own intercultural knowledge (for example, self-awareness, understanding and knowledge of intercultural differences), competence (for example, taking someone else's perspective, listening, observing and interpreting, the ability to interpret an event or document from the point of view of different cultures, the ability to create new knowledge concerning culture and cultural practice) and attitudes (respect - valuing other cultures, cultural diversity, openness - for intercultural learning and people from other cultures; restraint from judgment; curiosity and discovery - tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty).

Cultural competence implies the development of a multicultural identity that reflects, understands and is sensitive to one's own and other people's cultural identities. It implies that a person is comfortable in the company of others who do not belong to his cultural group, that he/she possesses knowledge about other cultural groups, as well as that he has the ability to achieve positive interactions with people of different cultural characteristics.

According to one of the most commonly used models, cultural competence consists of three components: awareness, knowledge and skills. Cultural awareness refers to an individual's adequate and appropriate attitudes, opinions, and assumptions about different cultures. Cultural awareness actually requires constant reflection on one's own attitudes towards other cultures and how one's own culture affects those attitudes. Cultural knowledge refers to the understanding of other cultures and cultural norms, while cultural skills refer to the ability to interact effectively and impartially with people from different cultures. Empathy, self-awareness, self-management and good communication skills are often mentioned as key parts of cultural competence.

Cross's model of cultural competence is widely used in the theory and research of this construct. The model implies the presence of five stages of cultural competence development, starting from destructiveness to advanced cultural competence:

1 Stage of cultural destructiveness – The most negative end of the continuum. It

describes the competence of an organization or individual who view cultural differences as a problem. It is characterized by inflexible behavior. A culturally different individual or group is considered genetically and culturally inferior.

- 2 Stage of cultural incompetence – The individual or organization is not intentionally culturally destructive, but lacks the capacity to have adequate interactions with culturally different individuals or groups. At this stage the individual or organization is extremely biased. Decisions and actions are driven by ignorance or feelings of superiority. People of culturally different origins are not valued or recognized, and expectations from them are reduced.
- 3 Cultural Blindness Stage – This is the middle of the continuum. An individual or organization operates with the belief that there are no cultural differences. This view does not imply the presence of bad intentions towards cultural diversity, although the consequences of this belief may be ignoring or not recognizing the strengths of different cultures. For example, this stage may manifest in an organization's reluctance to use alternative assessments or to change policies and procedures to "open the door" to diverse students.
- 4 Stage of cultural pre-competence - At this level, the individual or organization accepts and respects cultural differences. There are attempts at continuous self-evaluation in terms of culture. At this stage, proactivity and the search for knowledge from different cultural groups are characteristic.
- 5 Stage of cultural competence - This is the most positive and progressive level of Cross's model. An individual or organization proactively develops models and approaches that are fully grounded and culturally aligned.

Similar to Cross' model of cultural competence, Cormier developed a Cultural proficiency continuum, which distinguishes levels of response to cultural differences (Figure 1).

Reactive >>>>>>>>>Tolerance			Proactive >>>>>>>>>Transformation		
Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness	Cultural Pre-Competence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
See the difference; stomp it out.	See the difference; make it wrong	See the difference; dismiss it	See the difference; recognize what you don't know	See the difference; understand the difference that difference makes.	See the difference; respond positively and affirmingly.
Unhealthy Behavior			Healthy Behavior		

Figure 1. Cultural proficiency continuum (Cormier, 2021).

Cultural sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity can be defined as a critical awareness of one's own cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to cultural differences that reflect how individuals interpret intercultural differences. Also, cultural sensitivity is defined as an active desire to understand, appreciate and accept differences between cultures. It represents the affective dimension of intercultural communication and is considered crucial for the development of one's ability to think and act in an intercultural appropriate way. In a culturally diverse learning community, students from different cultural backgrounds bring their own ways of thinking into the learning context. With increased sensitivity to other cultures, they can better participate in classroom interactions, which in turn contributes to better learning outcomes.

Milton Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity represents the best-known theoretical framework for the interpretation of cultural sensitivity, but it is also an important theoretical base for designing educational interventions for the development of cultural competencies, bearing in mind that it helps educators in better creation, planning and implementation of trainings, understanding the resistance that individuals show at different stages of the development of cultural sensitivity and creating a stimulating environment for intercultural learning. In addition to interpreting this model at the individual level, it is also possible to interpret it at the organizational level.

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity describes the stages that individuals go through when meeting other cultures: from denying the existence of differences, ie. extreme ethnocentrism, towards the stages of observing and accepting them, that is, ethnorelativism. It distinguishes three basic stages of ethnocentrism and three stages of ethnorelativism, and within each of them several developmental intermediate stages, which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennet, 1986)

Ethnocentrism			Ethnorelativism		
Denial	Defense	Minimizing	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
Isolation	Disparagement	Physical universalism	Behavioral relativism	Empathy	Contextual evaluation
Separation	Superiority	Transcendental universalism	Value relativism	Pluralism	Constructive marginality
	Reversal				

Each of the stages implies the following:

- 1 Denial of difference – failure to perceive the existence or relevance of cultural diversity of others. Perceiving one's own culture is far more complex than perceiving other cultures. People are disinterested or perhaps even hostile

to intercultural communication. Depending on the severity, there are two subtypes of denial of differences: isolation – unintentional separation from members of other cultures, that is, the presence of life circumstances in which the individual does not have the opportunity to establish relationships with members of different cultures; separation – intentional separation from members of different cultures, because there is an opinion that this is better for their development and the development of the society to which they belong. In organizations, denial is a state in which there are no structures (policies and procedures) for recognizing and dealing with cultural diversity. Denial occurs when people who prefer stability (absence of differences) are forced by some circumstances to become aware of others (differences). This happens when, for example, a significant number of refugees or immigrants enter a community, or when people have to deal with cultural differences in a work organization.

2 Defense against differences – when the problem of denial is solved, people can move to the stage of defense against cultural differences. In this phase, the dichotomous categorization of "us and them" is characteristic, where others are perceived more complexly than in denial, but also in very stereotypical ways. People in this stage tend to be critical of other cultures and tend to blame cultural differences for society's general ills. There are three forms of defense: disparagement – a person treats other cultures as inferior, uses offensive terms to describe them, and applies negative stereotypes to other cultural groups; superiority – the tendency to emphasize and exaggerate the positive characteristics of one's own culture in comparison with other cultures, not necessarily disparaging other cultures; turning to the opposite – a person perceives another culture as superior, and looks down on his own culture and feels alienated.

3 Minimizing differences – in this stage, cultural differences are minimized with the assumption that it is much more important to emphasize similarities than differences. Similarities are based on known elements of one's own cultural worldview, and individuals assume that their own experiences are shared by others or that certain basic values and beliefs transcend cultural boundaries and are thus universally applicable. Emphasizing cross-cultural similarity creates "tolerance," whereby superficial cultural differences are seen as variations on common universal themes of humanity. However, minimization obscures deep cultural differences. The minimization problem for individuals is their desire to project sameness onto the wider world and that world's stubborn resistance to losing its real difference. This means that the more people seek contact with others in the name of shared values, the more likely they will be forced to confront significant cultural differences. Something similar happens in organizations, where an overemphasis on "unity" yields too much uniformity, which forces the organization to decentralize and focus on its diversity. In both individual and organizational cases, problem solving occurs when similarity and difference, unity and diversity, are put into dialectical form: similarities allow us to appreciate differences, and unity directs the focus to diversity. There are two different viewpoints about the same human nature in this phase, namely: physical universalism – insists on

physiological similarities, i.e. points out that all people have the same basic needs; transcendental universalism – implies the belief that all people are the same thanks to spiritual, political and other similarities.

4 Acceptance – at this stage, the individual notices and accepts cultural differences. Cultural differences are not evaluated based on the standards of one's own cultural group, but are studied in the cultural context from which they arise. Acceptance of cultural differences does not mean that they are necessarily evaluated positively, but the person's position is not ethnocentric. Individuals at this stage are curious about cultures and cultural differences. However, their limited knowledge of other cultures does not allow them to easily adapt their behavior to different cultural contexts. The guiding principle is cultural relativism, that is, the view that no culture is better or worse than others. Differences are accepted in two ways: behavioral relativism - a person accepts differences at the behavioral level, i.e. is aware that behavior changes depending on the cultural context; value relativism – means acceptance that the value system and beliefs, in addition to behavior, also vary from one cultural community to another. There is support for "diversity and inclusion" in organizations, but the incorporation of cultural sensitivity as a criterion for multicultural leadership has not yet been established.

5 Adaptation – in this phase the mechanism of "perspective taking" or empathy is present. This means that a person consciously tries to imagine what views of the world are held by members of other cultures. A person changes his frame of reference by adapting to the viewpoints, attitudes and beliefs of members of another cultural community. It is capable of changing perspectives, ways of communication or behavior according to the wishes, needs or demands of the cultural community. There are two types of adaptation: empathy – the ability to understand others by taking their point of view; pluralism – a person has internalized several different views on the world, i.e. more cultural frameworks. Organizations at this point in development have policies and procedures that are intentionally flexible enough to operate without undue cultural imposition. At the organizational level, adaptation is the essence of "incorporating" diversity into organizational processes.

6 Integration – while at the stage of adaptation a person is guided by several reference frames (which exist in parallel), in this phase the person has integrated these different cultural worldviews into a unique, own worldview. Her identity includes and, more importantly, transcends the cultural groups to which she belongs. This stage is also characterized by intercultural communication. Integration can occur in two forms: contextual evaluation - the ability to use different cultural frames of reference in the assessment of a given situation; constructive marginality – accepting an identity that is not primarily based on one of the cultures. A person is in constant development and does not limit or emphasize the influence of different cultures on personal development, does not identify with any culture, but sees them as a chance for development.

What we know from the literature is that, for quality fostering in practice, we primarily want our staff to have developed cultural competences (for they

will use those competences in their work), and we want to develop cultural sensitivity among our young people (for they will interact and connect with diverse youth).

Lessons learned from education, social care and youth work

- ◆ Cultural competence, in a broad sense, is understood as the ability of educators to **successfully teach** young people who come from different cultures, different from their own. The practices and artifacts that educators adopt to value cultural diversity are essential to developing a warm environment that supports the individual needs of young people and for the appreciation of diversity in the organisation/institution.
- ◆ Defining the standards for the implementation of policy and practice, with a special focus on the development of professional competences of staff to work with different groups of youth, is crucial for the realization of the organisations' vision. Initial training, **professional development** and ongoing support for staff members are key to developing an effective inclusive organisation.
- ◆ A culturally competent educator possesses **knowledge** about the characteristics of his own culture, the characteristics of the culture of others, the characteristics of his own organisational environment and the characteristics of culturally different youth and their families; has **attitudes** that point to the willingness to relativize cultural values, the absence of stereotypes and prejudices in contact with culturally different youth, awareness of the non-existence of universally applicable patterns of behavior in all cultures; possesses the **skills** of interpreting the meaning of thoughts, ideas and events of culturally different young people and their parents, accepting the expectations of culturally different young people and parents, adapting to verbal and non-verbal styles of communication, mediation and peaceful conflict resolution and is characterized by positive behavioral characteristics (patience, flexibility, openness, empathy).
- ◆ A culturally competent educator recognizes **diversity as a strength** and strives to create an inclusive group environment that simultaneously fosters positive cross-cultural relationships among young people and a sense of socio-political awareness.
- ◆ One of the key competences for lifelong learning defined by the European Commission implies precisely **cultural awareness and expression**.
- ◆ Educators and other actors in an intercultural educational environment (no matter in which formal setting it is placed) should:
 - Recognize that some organizational practices may contribute to exclusion and segregation; therefore, they should provide **teaching methods** adapted to the different cultural belonging of the youth they work with;
 - Plan a **program** and environment that reflects respect for all cultural, ethnic,

social and religious differences among people and that promotes the cultural identities of all youth included in it;

- Recognize and respond appropriately to **cultural perspectives** that affect the achievement and overall progress of culturally diverse youth;

- Create a teaching and learning environment that positively affects how young people **feel** about the organisation/ institution, feel accepted and cared for;

- Facilitate a **culturally diverse collective** that reflects the real differences that exist in a certain society and, more importantly, in the organisational environment itself;

- Prepare a **plan for the inclusion** of culturally diverse parents and close families in the teaching and learning process if that is possible or needed (if the organisation has a chance to collaborate with the family of the young person), that is, to deal with specific practical issues related to language barriers between organisational staff and parents, explaining the organisations expectations to parents and families who may not understand the way the organisation or institutions functions because they come from different environments, as well as ways of further engagement and inclusion of parents and family members in organisational activities (again, if the collaboration with the family is in the focus of the organisation).

- ◆ Educators, as "transmitters" of interculturality, are expected to know the principles and values of interculturality, to be sensitive and open, to analyze and question their own attitudes, as well as to be ready to improve their competences in order to be a **role model** for youth in the process of adopting values, attitudes and behaviors, which ensure the stability of culturally complex communities.

- ◆ Therefore, in order for educators to be culturally competent, they first need to develop **self-reflection**, that is, to know themselves well, their own values and beliefs; to understand diversity by knowing the characteristics, habits and behavior patterns of their students; apply culturally responsive teaching; to have a multicultural educational approach.

- ◆ The salient characteristics of a **culturally responsive and competent** educator are:

- Sociocultural awareness: recognizes that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that one's position in the social order affects those ways;

- Affirmative attitudes towards young people of culturally different backgrounds: seeing the learning resources of all young people, instead of viewing differences as problems to be overcome;

- Commitment and skills to act as agents of change: see themselves as responsible and capable of advocating for changes in the organisation or the system that will make the organisation more accountable for all young people it engages with;

- Constructive views of learning: understand how young people construct knowledge and are competent to encourage their construction of knowledge;

- Learning about the concrete young people: knowing about the lives of the youth he/she works with; and

- Culturally responsive teaching practices: use their knowledge of the lives of

the young people they work with to design instruction that builds on what they already know, while introducing them beyond the familiar.

◆ Some educators spend a lot of time finding appropriate and relevant materials that align with the learning objectives outlined in the curriculums they want to implement, while few consider social and cultural biases in the materials.

Curriculum transformation requires educators to change the structure of their curriculum to enable young people to consider concepts, issues, events and topics from a multicultural perspective. It is important that the curriculum is flexible enough to provide opportunities for adaptation to individual needs and to stimulate educators to seek solutions that will be in accordance with the needs and abilities of each young person in their group. Many curricula expect all youth to learn the same things, at the same time and with the same means and methods, which reflects culturally unresponsive practice.

◆ While it is important for educators to focus on curriculum and various needs of the youth they work with regarding their personal and social life, it is also valuable for them to recognize the **role they play in the lives** of their group members, especially for those young people who may be vulnerable and marginalized. The ways and processes of work in a group based on the cultural competence of educators contribute to the development of a climate of mutual understanding, respect and equal cooperation, which is based on knowledge and respect for the different lifestyles of peers from the group, their values, beliefs, traditions, customs, stereotypes, cultural elements different – similarities and differences.

◆ Therefore, the need for culturally competent educators is critically important because young persons' academic achievement, critical awareness, cultural sensitivity, and social competence are closely related to a **culturally synchronized learning environment**.

◆ Educators' attitudes and beliefs about diversity as a value are reflected in their group members **experiences**.

Educators' attitudes about respecting diversity and cultural pluralism are associated with a lower perception of the degree of discrimination by youth who belong to minority groups.

◆ Educator competencies are also necessary for **culturally responsive management** in the group, which is an approach to managing the group dynamic with all its members in a culturally responsive manner. As culturally responsive leaders, educators recognize their own biases and values and reflect on how they affect their expectations of behavior and interactions with others. They also recognize that the goal of group management is not to achieve control, but to provide all its members with equal learning opportunities and understand that culturally responsive management is a function of social justice.

◆ **Cultural sensitivity** is considered an asset for every educator, necessary, not only for the formation of his own cultural view of the world, which will make it easier for

him to notice, analyze and accept the cultural diversity of young people, but also for the acquisition and development of intercultural competences necessary for working in culturally plural classes.

Previous studies in the school system often point to teachers' conceptual confusion in understanding cultural diversity and pedagogical difficulties in modifying practice in a responsive manner, which school practitioners usually attribute to inadequate teacher education and organizational/structural constraints such as lack of time and resources. School leadership is seen as key to providing such training, but also to promoting all aspects of a diversity-friendly school context. Also, citing the low time commitment to inclusive education training and the increasing demands on teachers to effectively include all students in the classroom, many teachers report feeling inadequately prepared to teach students with diverse needs and abilities.

Research in six European countries also showed that teachers feel that they receive insufficient or even no training to deal with cultural diversity in the classroom. The above points to the need to implement additional programs with the intention of improving the cultural competence of teachers, and there is strong research evidence that speaks in favor of the positive impact of training on improving the cultural competence of teachers.

◆ Integral to multicultural social work practice are four major competencies that effective multicultural social work practitioners should be able to **achieve and demonstrate** in their practice. These competencies are (1) becoming aware of one's own values, biases, and assumptions about human behavior; (2) understanding the worldviews of culturally diverse clients; (3) developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques; and (4) understanding organizational and institutional forces that enhance or diminish cultural competence.

In Sweden, cultural competence is often singled out as both a strategy and solution for managing differences attributed to migrants, but few studies have critically investigated the idea of cultural competence. The analysis shows that cultural competencies almost exclusively attributed to staff who have a migrant background, and that the position as culturally competent is ambiguous. On the one hand a position as expert, on the other hand surrounded by a suspicion not to be professional. Cultural competence rather emerges as a tool to master and control the boys who are placed in the studied institutions than as a tool to affect a change process in support of multiculturalism. Through a latent content analysis of course syllabi from 27 US-based social work programs, three key assumptions emerged: social workers are members of dominant social groups; cultural competency and anti-oppression are compatible frameworks; self-awareness mitigates oppression. Findings reflect the reification of dominant culture groups in social work and promotion of individual-level skill development over structural change. Implications and recommendations for social work education and future research are discussed. Nylund criticized concept of cultural competence, noticed that the most cultural diversity classes in social work are taught from a liberal or conservative multicultural perspective that precludes a power analysis and

a critical discussion of whiteness. Author consider that in order to undo this practice, social educators need to incorporate critical multiculturalism as a tool in subverting racism. Study explored the challenges of newly employed social workers educated about diversity practice by Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in practicing cultural competence relative to their professional experiences. The findings emphasized the multifaceted nature of cultural competence and highlighted: areas for growth in feelings of inadequacy (due to a lack of familiarity or a lack of experience); frustration with fundamental organizational barriers (lack of resources and education, good diversity policies) and prejudice from clients.

◆ A six-stage developmental **continuum of cultural competence** for is derived from the social care field, which can be of importance to all organisations working with youth, no matter in which field. These stages are (1) cultural destructiveness (forced assimilation), (2) cultural incapacity (discriminatory practice), (3) cultural blindness (helping methods used by the dominant culture as universally applicable), (4) cultural precompetence (hiring minority staff, but change stays only structural), (5) cultural competence (great opportunities to increase staff multicultural skills and knowledge, and (6) cultural proficiency (both the organization itself and individuals within the organization are operating at high levels of cultural competence).

◆ **Multicultural family social work**, should be guided by the following in everyday practice of practitioners that implement their work with young people including their families:

- Diversity management involves handling different cultural conceptions of the family.
- The expert should be aware that one definition of family cannot be seen as superior to another.
- The expert should know that families cannot be understood apart from the cultural, social, and political dimensions of their functioning. The traditionally defined nuclear family, consisting of heterosexual parents in a long-term marriage, raising their biological children, and with the father as sole wage earner, is starting to be a statistical minority.
- The expert should give an effort to learn as much as possible about how cultural group that is different that her/his, about how defines the family, the values that underlie the family unit, and your own contrasting definition of the family.
- The expert should be attentive to traditional cultural family structures and extended family ties. For example, nonblood relatives may be considered an intimate part of the extended family system.
- The expert should not prejudge from their own ethnocentric perspective. For example, they have to be aware that eastern compared to western, white population may have spousal relationships that are more patriarchal, view the wifely role as less important than the motherly role.
- Multicultural social work needs modifying the practitioners' goals and techniques to fit the needs of culturally diverse populations.
- The expert should assess the importance of ethnicity to clients, both individuals and families. Have to be aware that acculturation is very

important for the children and young people in a family, because they are the ones most likely to be influenced by peers. Also, many conflicts between younger and older generations are related to cultural conflicts. These conflicts are not pathological, but normative responses to different cultural forces.

◆ Education programs for professional development of practitioners that are in direct contact with youth should always include **explicit and implicit curriculum content** related to ethnic and cultural diversity, gender, language, nationality, religion, and sexual orientation.

◆ Quality diversity fostering practitioners should bear in mind:

- Sociodemographic group identities often dictate how we define problems and choose interventions. The cultural perspectives of young people and their families may often clash with that of the well-intentioned expert, who must develop culturally appropriate **intervention strategies** in working with clients and client systems.

- Experts must be able to **hear the voices** of their oppressed clients, to understand their experiences of marginalization, to empathize with the pain and hardships they have had to endure, and be aware that their position in this society may be due to no fault of their own.

- In many respects, work with youth in various fields is about **social justice**. Given this statement, it is important to realize that racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, and classism are functions of the unjust treatment of various socially marginalized groups in society.

- Have to understand that the work and responsibilities of the experts are directed at **changing** not simply the lives of individuals, but the very institutional and cultural policies and practices that prevent equal access and opportunity.

- Know that cultural competence is a **lifelong journey** that never ends. Practitioners and educators shouldn't be discouraged.

- The expert should be aware that the first step toward cultural competence is to work on **understanding** himself/herself's racial/cultural being. Understanding other groups becomes the next priority.

◆ In order for the educators to encourage the cultural competence and sensitivity of young people, it is necessary to:

- They recognize differences and that diversity and discrimination are not **taboo** topics;

- They encourage young people and adults from different backgrounds to cooperate in order to achieve common goals (they encourage young people to **cooperate** in order to achieve intercultural relations);

- Include leaders, volunteers and practitioners from **different backgrounds** (establish mentoring relationships between adults and youth; include community visitors and volunteers of different cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual, linguistic and religious backgrounds or orientations);

- Include **traditional elements** from different and numerous cultures (eg multicultural books, games and posters that reflect different experiences, culturally specific events).

- Support **cultural identity research** among young people and seek to understand them through their own definitions (eg, various books and resources that reflect open views on identity, diversity and cultural issues).
- ◆ Educators need to have **culturally specific knowledge** about the youth population they work with. This knowledge includes, but is not limited to, the history of a particular cultural group, experience with prejudice and discrimination, as well as general knowledge of culturally specific beliefs of a particular group.
- ◆ Professionals working with youth today must understand their own culture and its distinctive values, consider the different cultures and values of their youth participants and families, and examine **how to meet the needs** of each young person by acknowledging and respecting their culture and values.