

ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY - THE KEY TO A FUTURE PERMITTING

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This article is based on a speech by Didi Devapriya Deshaies (NFA chairman) in the conference "How can we transform the educational system to build a more sensitive and more lenient?" - July 11, AB Tech Campus, Asheville, NC:

Since last year we were involved in Bucharest in preparation of 100 kindergarten teachers in the project "We all have a story" for developing a positive attitude to accept diversity in both children and educators. The project is financed by EEA Grants under the program "Fund for NGOs" and is a collaboration between the Center for Partnership and Equality (CPE), and Romano Butiq AMURTEL Romania.



During a training session, I introduced a simple exercise. Teachers gathered in a circle with their eyes closed, and we've put colored post-it on his forehead. Most received yellow post-it notes and a few have received post-it green. When they opened their eyes could see colored post-its on the foreheads of others, but did not know what color the their foreheads. At first, they walked around the room and have fun at the idea of having something stuck on his forehead. Then I told them to avoid those who had post-it green, as if they were friends. Changing the atmosphere in the room was visible and felt some tension. As they began to ignore them and avoid them in green on the forehead, the uproar in the room took on shades nervous because nobody knew what color. Eye to eye contact became uncertain, and question "will exclude me and me?" Floated in the air.

Definitely decreases when excluding intra-n scene

When I discussed this exercise, all teachers explained that when he began exclusion, everyone felt unsafe. And when I asked why they excluded those with green, they all said, "because you tell us so." That was the game, really, but what followed some instructions that it was obvious that he was hurting others? Even those who were friends for years, began immediately exclude as directed by surprise and shock apropiatilorlor. There were a few exceptions though - I remember a case where "green" was a girl of Roma ethnicity. She simply refused to be excluded, rushed into the center of the circle and started dancing in the middle! Of course, it was an arbitrary and artificial situation, however caused moments of pause and reflection.

Strong adult children observe the world

Social barriers are essentially so arbitrary and artificial, the forming human beings? We learn at a very young age by observing authoritarian world of adults. It is unfortunately a reality that some children learn from their parents not to play with certain groups of children. Chair in cases in which bias is not explained directly, immediately notice the child who is important and who is not, who to include in our circle of friends - either from the media or from school, or directly from the family. Who is visible in the limelight society and who does not?

If our experiences match those who are paying attention and prestige in society, our sense of importance gain new strengths, perhaps even becoming overrated. If you own experiences, our skills or family are invisible to society, there is a risk of increasing the belief that what we do is less valuable, maybe even a wrong picture about their own identity.

**Inclusion is for all of us; it is
not a minority issue**



Inclusion is not an issue of "minority" affects us all. Include not just be in social contact with a variety of people. People "yellow" or "green" were together, but the environment was one that was cultivated separation. To us lenient towards a future that we all need to assume a vision of open, inclusive and based on empathy the whole society. Empathy is the natural language of the heart. Prejudice, stereotypes, all forms of exclusion are learned outside. They are the result of our conditioning and adapt to a world that is dominated by competition and cooperation more than exclusion and inclusion. When the education system supports learning from authoritative sources and not through the natural process of personal research bases are easily transmitted from one generation to another. We can not protect our children from the harsh realities of a world biased than talking to them about love and kindness. If we want to inoculate their opinions against bias and exclusion must teach them to think with the heart. We need to support the formation of a strong sense of justice, equality and love to be able to question the absurdities, injustices and insults, even when they come from authoritative sources in the adult world.

About exclusion of Roma in our kindergarten

**"Porajmos" WWII Holocaust:
1,500,000 Roma victims**



I will share an example that was actually the inspiration for the project "We all have a story" in Bucharest. In Europe, one of the most excluded and marginalized minority is the Roma. When I was a kid, I remember that I dressed up for Halloween in "Gypsy" with big earrings, long skirt colored bandana. But I had no idea as "Gypsies" is an ethnicity, not just a lifestyle until I arrived in Europe. Roma population migrated from India now more than a thousand years during the Middle Ages extremely xenophobic, they were treated with fear and hostility. In some cases, including Romania, they were enslaved, and therefore in Romania exists today a great number of Roma population. Besides Hebrew, Roma were the other main ethnic group targeted during the Holocaust in Europe and largely annihilated.

I remember a discussion a few days when teachers were preparing new curriculum for kindergarten, on the theme minority. Our kindergarten has a long tradition in promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities and think about how to expand this topic and to minorities. A teacher said, "but we in Romania are not so racist as you Americans. We have nothing that black people. " I was really surprised and I asked her, "but you have to say about Roma?" And she immediately said, "Oh, this is different, they are really bad, you can not trust them." However, all of which I described as the Roma minority, in my view were specific to any group that has been marginalized economically and socially living in a sad and hopeless situation.

A "cracker" stereotypes joins

Shortly thereafter, I hired Julia, a woman of Roma, the position of executive director of our organization. It is smart, educated and extremely capable. It is also a dedicated activist of his ethnicity. I was glad to have her in our team in a management position, because it was "burglar" perfect stereotypes, not only for educators but also for the children who grow our center placement, many of whom are Roma and they were in denial and ashamed of their identity.

Entering kindergarten curriculum about ethnic group



Once we included a team, I engaged a planning curriculum on ethnic group, and the first necessary step was to expose teachers accurate information about Roma and they challenge their own stereotypes so as not to send them to turn children. After several weeks in which educators were talking to children about ethnic group, told stories with characters Roma, I invited Yulia class to interact directly with children. Educators have used the term "Roma" in the curriculum, which is really the correct term, however in popular culture, the term with a pejorative connotation, uglier is "Gypsy". To assure me that children will link the term "Roma" and the "Gypsy" I asked if they had any friends "Gypsy". Some had many of them, some have said he is not allowed to play with gypsies. Yulia sitting next to me when I said I have a good friend who is "Gypsy". "Really, who?" Asked the children. And when we presented Yulia as gypsy, but I told them that she prefers the term "Roma". At that time they already knew Julia for some time, and had played with it, but when we introduced it in this way, one of the girls had a sudden reaction, pre-programmed and said: "yucky ..." jumping back. Children began to consult with each other, saying that all gypsies are bad, stealing and dangerous - bineninteles confirming the information it had with the supreme and unchallengeable authority - Television!

Beyond silence



It was a critical moment. If I reacted with fear and I would have said, "Shh, it's not polite to say it, you should not speak so" children should be taught that it is not nice to talk like that but it would be understood that their information is incorrect. The message, in this case, would have been "yes, yes, you're right, but you should not say that out loud because it's not polite."

But I was excited and I thought the situation created an opportunity to intervene in a positive way. The children were still small so that bias was only surface and exposing to test and see if they're right or not. It was also clear that they observed many things in their environment and drew logical conclusions based on erroneous and biased information from authoritative sources for them.

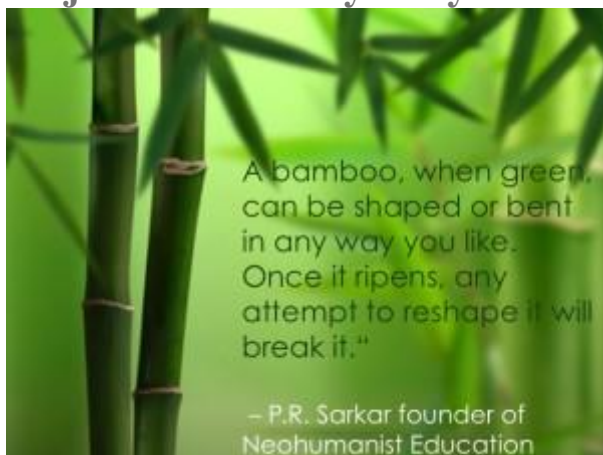
Simulating critical thinking

I saw it on TV



I began a process of questions to direct to activate their own thinking and to connect to their heart. While they claimed that all Roma steal, because they saw it on TV, I asked "Do you think that in Germany are people who steal? Or in America? You saw that on TV?" They consulted among themselves and agreed that there is definitely thieves and other countries. "Steal all Americans or all Germans?" "No, of course not," they decided. "So you are sure that all Roma steal?" I asked. Now there were not so sure how they had been minutes before. I then shared my opinion: "I think there may be good people and bad people orinude". And they had been thinking about it. I encouraged them to learn more about Julia, who was with us and that was Roma, they believed that she steal? "No!" The children responded. Then they found out what your favorite game is, what colors she likes, and found they had much in common. They saw a few pictures of her when she was little. It was easy, spontaneous and natural to connect with it in this way. Later I asked Julia if it saddened her when she was a child. She told them how some children used to tease and give him various nicknames for being Roma children were terrified. I asked what they would do if they would happen to some of their friends and they all wanted to help. When I started role-playing game, nobody wanted to be the one who taunted. A year later, when assessing the previous year, children were asked to draw what they have learned and remember, and some of them drew pictures with Roma people, saying "I learned to love the Roma people (Gypsies)". It was a moment of satisfaction and an intervention that had a powerful impact so that I developed over the years to come.

Prejudices are not yet crystallized in childhood



In 2014 it partnered with two other humanitarian organizations in Bucharest, CPE and Romano Butiq to share with others the methodology for promoting inclusion; not only ethnic group but for children with disabilities and to overcome stereotypes gen. Am limiting chosen to focus is childhood, because this is the key period when children form their value system on the world and others. At this age children still have assumptions they are testing, but later, if the information biased is not confronted with information rational and correct misconceptions are internalized and crystallized and become part rigid child's vision of the world, which is difficult to change subsequent. As sustained and founder of Education Neoumaniste a bamboo can be easily modeled as green and raw, but once it dries and hardens, break if you try to bend it. Children who are exposed to accept diversity positive experiences easier and more natural and does not need much work to demolish prejudices, unlike adults who have not had such positive experiences.

Authentic relationships are key

Friendship: the best antidote to stereotyping, prejudice



The basic premise of this project is that the cure is true friendship prejudices. I personally believe that one of the best ways to maintain respect, friendship and understanding among people is to listen to the stories of others. If we can create secure contexts in which people can open up and share their experiences, it is easy to connect and to relate. So we can see the beauty of being human universal. Often we find that we have much more in common than differences, and the differences are interesting rather than threatening. We have the opportunity to become curious and learn more. Often feel barriers posed by what we consider "polite" but if we feel safe to open ourselves we find that those barriers are just an expression of fear and ignorance, which will dissolve into nothingness because they have no basis real. Once you know enough someone that to care, whether gay or deaf or other ethnic groups, it is difficult to emit People generally negative on the whole group, because you will think of your friend included in that group . Sometimes it nevi to be careful and this issue because it is easy to exclude friend in that group considering it "an exception" and to keep our image stereotype saying "but you're not like them, you're one of us" . We ensure that educators understand that such a situation puts the person in a minority situation and uncomfortable, and the exclusion of a minority group and it belongs.

We know each other by asking questions

I remember when I presented it to Vania, a woman with visual dizabikitati children from the orphanage "Family AMURTEL". I encouraged them to ask how they were doing in different situations daily. For example, asked her: "How do you know if it's wearing clothes that fit, if you do not see them?" It was fascinating to find creative solutions they found. He said: "I can do everything you do and you", and I added with admiration and respect: "Certainly you can, but with more work and creativity". She smiled and agreed.

Falling in love is natural

Falling in love with each other is natural



I have faith that if you really see another human being, we fall in love with him or her. So is our human nature, there is nothing special or extraordinary fall in love, is beyond what I feel towards everyone if our hearts are truly conscious.

So, in our project, one of the basic components was to include the opportunity for our educators to meet a wide variety of people from minorities to those with special needs and to facilitate the exchange of experiences and sharing personal stories. It was a satisfying success. Although experienced in training and other educators who have sensitized the experiences of minorities, nothing has been more eloquent and more memorable than direct opening of another being and sharing personal experience. During this session, participants helped to narrate some interesting experiences in a manner appropriate to their age and children. One of the participants, a young visually impaired from birth, for example told us about his friendship with his favorite uncle. He told us about their walk through the village, about exploring together different smells, sounds and textures - from odor barn unclean pigs, the pleasant smell of pans fresh baked into the neighbor's house, texture muddy road unpaved, or sunetulcarutelor passing .. the teachers were visibly moved, and all our guests felt inspired and encouraged. The next step of the project this fall, will be the resource persons to come straight in class and to tell their story. Educators will facilitate interaction with these children, and will work together to remove the prejudices that may occur in a rational manner, as I described in my expeienta Iulia.

We are here because we all believe in shaping a future permitting. It is the same dream that helped humanity to evolve as the star ploara that we use to correct our path. For hundreds of years visionaries have tried to inspire us toward a future in peace based on the values of love. However, visions and ideals are not enough. Evolution of human consciousness is a process that requires active participation. We must have a clear picture of the positive dynamics of obstacles. It is natural to empathize, to love, as I mentioned earlier why we presented the world as full of hatred, aggression, war, violence and exclusion?

Identity formation and circles of "mine-ness"



If you look at the formation of our identity, everything starts with personal awareness of self. Then learn to identify with the family and everything in this circle is safe, while the rest of the world is something else. Step into the big world the first time go to school and make friends from neighboring environment. Later we form a sense of belonging there a particular city, state, namely a religion, gender, etc. We form a sense of identity with several layers, like concentric circles. Everything within these circles is our comfort zone, is "ours"; and the term "I" or "we" generates a period of "them". Self and the Other, new and others. And the "Other" is not part of the "We" is part of the unknown is foreign and even dangerous.



When "other" is experienced as not being part of the "I", this generates fear. Behind the phenomenon of exclusion, hatred and violence, there are actually several expressions of fear over the other. PR Sarkar, founder of education and philosophy neumanista, spoke about the need to extend this range, and instead to cultivate barriers generating fear, to exindem sense of identity and empathy to the wider "circle" possible - a circle include the entire universe. A circle without limits. This we would not erase their identity - we can not, nor should we try to standardize identiatea everyone - but would celebrate "diversity as a law of nature", which to rejoice.



The only way to overcome fear is to face it and realize that it is without any basis, without any basis. While light has a physical existence, the darkness has not - it's just lack of light. Likewise, while love has a exitenta, fear not - it is simply that lack of love. So, each time encountering barriers every time you have that hesitation, that discomfort, shyness or more, hatred, or other barriers must face. If you turn on the light, darkness disappears immediately. If we allow ourselves to go beyond our comfort zone and discover human being, barriers of fear and ignorance evaporates and discover our humanity asserted in power. To do this requires an active attitude, but the reward is a life fuller and freer. Unconfronted Fear keeps us "safe" in our comfort zone. As parents, educators or mentors can not assume that we are open-minded, we must make constant efforts to provoke and to get out of your comfort zone, to enable us to enter the world of culture and others. Doing this ongoing effort, it allows us to have the courage to help children to stay connected with their heart and to the circle exinda neumanista approach, universal. In this way we can build a lenient and that it will be easy living.