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DEVELOPING EMPATHY IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Nowadays, in our constantly changing and developing world, we have great opportunity to experience ongoing immersion in other cultures. Humanity has been dealing with problems of cross-cultural communication since the first representatives of two different cultures made a contact. For the last century, scientists and researchers in this field have been working and developing theories and ways of dealing with intercultural differences. However, the problem still exists because it is not only a scientific but also psychological matter. Each person can overcome cross-cultural ignorance only through own experience, tolerance to somebody's difference, general cross-cultural competence and commonsense [2, c. 420].

Some steps to become cross-culturally intelligent are:

- cultural generalization needs to be sanctioned and differentiated from cultural stereotypes;
- culture-general should precede culture-specific;
- culture-general frameworks are necessary, and they should be presented from concrete to abstract;
- the goal of cross-cultural learning is empathy, not just tolerance.

Depending on individual's cognitive orientation used to understand cultural differences people can react to it in different ways. During the process of acquaintance with different culture, an individual can experience different state of intercultural sensitivity. Where at the beginning of process one sees his own culture as central and only reasonable. Then one develops a more and more moderate point of view, where one experiences own culture as in context of other cultures. At the end of process, one's culture becomes relative to any other.

Dr. Milton Bennett developed the model, which describes the different ways in which people can react to cultural differences [1, c. 152]. It contains the following points:

1. Denial of difference. Individuals experience their own culture as the only “real one”. Other cultures are either not noticed at all or are understood in simplistic manner.
2. Defense against Difference. One’s own culture is experienced as the most evolved or best way to live. This position is characterized by negative stereotyping.
3. Minimization of difference. At this stage, people emphasize human similarity in physical structure, psychological needs or assumed adherence to universal values.
4. Acceptance of difference. One’s culture is considered as one of a number of equal, complex and valuable worldviews.
5. Adaption to difference. Individuals are able to expand their own worldviews to accurately understand other cultures and behave in appropriate way to this or that culture.
6. Integration of Difference. Individuals are easily enter and exit other culture worldviews

To reach the highest level of cross-cultural sensitivity an individual has to acquire an awareness of difference between cultures, discover similarities, grasp the importance of intercultural difference, explore and research into the other culture and finally develop empathy toward the other culture.

References

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