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Mainstreaming vocational guidance for Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Migrants

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- 1. The processes described above which most accurately reflect how I work at the moment (or have worked in the past);*
- 2. Elements of my practice which could better to meet the needs of refugee, asylum-seeker and migrant clients;*
- 3. How my practice should take into account the heterogeneous nature of the client group and its diverse needs.*

- 1. The processes described above which most accurately reflect how I work at the moment (or have worked in the past)**

Introduction-Description of my personal situation while offering counseling¹:

In reading and analyzing the suggested literature concerning different approaches to the term **multiculturalism** and the concept of **multicultural guidance**, I have come to the conclusion that I need to implement many changes to improve the quality of the counseling I am offering at the moment.

The first question with which I am confronted is to determine whether the counseling I offer falls under the rubric of **multicultural guidance**. One important requirement is that the counselor and the counselee differ from one another in terms of ethnicity, race, culture, etc.² Turning to concepts of **culture** and of **culture difference**. I compare the insights of Edward Tylor and Hartwig Frisch. Edward Burnett Tylor argues, “Culture is the complex whole of knowledge, religion, art, ethics, laws and customs besides the other skills and habits that a person has adopted as a member of a community”³ while Hartwig Frisch maintains, “Culture is custom”⁴. Both authors agree that culture is produced by people and is a result of interaction among them and their surroundings. These elements of culture, such as laws, ethics and customs, are influenced by geographical, political, economic and technological circumstances, and are affected by historical events that influence our self-concept. These changes differ from one geographic area to another ...⁵.

These definitions of culture lead me to inquire whether the counseling I am offering is

¹ I am working for a local organization called Amnesty for Women e.V. that is based in Hamburg and provides social and legal counseling to migrant women who are coming from many different countries. I am responsible for the women coming from Latin-America.

² Herring, 1997, Multicultural counselling in schools. A synergic approach. Alexandria, VA: American Counselling Assotiation.

³ Edward Burnett Tylor, 1871.

⁴ Hartwig Frisch, “Europas Kulturhistorie”, 1928.

⁵ Vagn Saerkjaer, Multiculktural competence-an introduction. PP 1.

of multicultural nature. If the answer is negative, it is then **monocultural**. **Monocultural** communication is based on common behaviors, beliefs, language and values.⁶ These similarities enable members of the same cultural background to predict the behavior of others and assume a common perception of reality. **Monocultural** communication is, thus, based on similarities.

If I assume that the communication I have with my clients is **monocultural**, I must conclude that I share the same culture with a woman from Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador or even Brazil or any other coming from a Latin-American country. This conclusion is not accurate. South America is a large continent and although it shares a common language (apart from Brazil) there are numerous and varied cultural differences. For this reason, I maintain that I do offer multicultural counseling. Those seeking counseling have different cultures themselves, which are in most cases different from mine.

What is it **intercultural communication**?

Intercultural communication can be described as “face-to-face interaction between people whose cultures are significantly different from one other.”⁷ The attributes needed to establish meaningful intercultural communication are language, non-verbal communication, communication style, values and assumptions.⁸

We can now analyze what a professional working in the field of multicultural guidance needs to develop towards successful counseling.⁹ Vagn Saerjkaer argues **multicultural competence** encompasses will, knowledge and proficiency in:

1. Being conscious of one’s feelings and reactions
2. being able to see different explanations of another person’s behavior
3. Being able to interpret communication and power structures of another culture
4. thinking over how one should act appropriately
5. being able to communicate, impact a message, enter an agreement and solve a conflict

In thinking through these issues, I found Launikari and Puukari’s edited volume, ‘Multicultural Guidance’ of great interest.¹⁰ In chapter III they cite an author Bennett, J¹¹ who says that **intercultural competency** consists of a *Mindset* (cognitive variables), a *Skillset* (behavioural skills) and a *Heartset* (affective variables).

A. The **Mindset** consists of knowledge regarding areas such as cultural self-awareness, culture-general and culture-specific frameworks, identity development patterns as well as understanding of cultural adaptation processes. The author

⁶ Multicultural Guidance and counselling. Theoretical Foundation and Best Practices, Ed. Mika Launikari and Sauli Puukari.2005 Pp. 152.

⁷ Bennet, M , 1998, “Basic concepts of intercultural communication. Selcted readings. Yamouth, ME, Intercultural Press.

⁸ Multicultural Guidance and counselling. Theoretical Foundation and Best Practices, Ed. Mika Launikari and Sauli Puukari.2005 Pp. 152.

Multicultural Guidance and counselling. Theoretical Foundation and Best Practices, Ed. Mika Launikari and Sauli Puukari.2005 Pp. 27-41

¹⁰ Multicultural Guidance and counselling. Theoretical Foundation and Best Practices, Ed. Mika Launikari and Sauli Puukari.2005

¹¹ Bennett J., 2003

emphasises the importance of awareness of the counsellor regarding his/her own values, biases and specific knowledge about their own racial and cultural heritage. Counsellor's own understanding of her/his own background affects the way s/he personally communicates and gives counselling.

AWARENESS of the IMPACT of CULTURE on personalities, behaviour and communication style of both the counsellor her/himself and the client.¹²

B. The *Skillset* is communication as behavioural skill. Communication is both verbal and non-verbal. Since communication is also influenced by numerous cultural differences, counsellors have to be familiar with some of these differences. Misjudgement, stereotyping etc. can lead to miscommunication between persons of different cultures.

C. *Heartset* is counsellors' attitudes towards other cultures. It is very important that counsellors are aware of any negative emotional reactions and consequences caused by discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping. Guidance counsellors should be committed to understanding themselves as racial cultural beings seeking a non-racist identity. Counsellors should be able to recognise the limits of their competence and seek professional expertise from a more qualified individuals when needed.¹³

While reading the book, I have realised that I am not providing multicultural guidance to my clients, but rather purely social and legal orientation. Frequently I have thought about my role as social assistance within AfW. I have concluded that I have been required to give INFORMATION (social and legal information) and the objective of the counselling is to accompany and support women in their own way, to respect their decisions and their own goals. It is up to them to decide WHAT to do and HOW to do it. In principle this is a valid approach, but it is not enough. I have not been offering multicultural guidance because the first characteristic mentioned as a requirement for a competent cultural counsellor according to the ones mentioned by Sue¹⁴ has been missing—namely, the awareness of one's own assumptions, values, and biases. I definitely need to become more aware of my personal history.

The fact that I am a migrant in Germany sometimes has lead to situations in which I compared or transposed my own experience to that of the person seeking counselling without being able to separate myself or act more objectively. Thus, I have not been acting in a competent way and I have not been conscious of my own feelings and reactions.

Another problem or mistake I have been making is that my role, in many cases, has been unclear to my clients and I have not clarified and defined it to my clients as clearly as I might have done. I must place greater emphasis on informing clients of the confidentiality of our discussions and attempt to better define the goals and nature of counselling.

¹² Metsaenen, 2000.

¹³ Multicultural Guidance and counselling. Theoretical Foundation and Best Practices“, Ed. Mika Launikari and Sauli Puukari.2005 Pp. 161

¹⁴Sue, W.G., Ivey, A. E.&Pedersen, P.B. 1996. A theory of multicultural counselling and therapy. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

2. Elements of my practice which could be better to meet the needs of refugee, asylum-seeker and migrant clients

Following the issues analyzed in the first section of this report, I have determined several concrete changes which would improve the quality of the work I am carrying out.

1. Increased consciousness of my own feelings and reactions
2. Being aware of my own personal history and background
3. Being better informed about the situation and culture of the countries of origin of my clients
4. Trying to be more objective by separating my own history and experience as a migrant from that of my client
5. Attempting to understand the other's perspective by temporarily giving up my own worldview to participate in the other's.

Concrete tips were given by Ridley and Upide¹⁵ concerning empathy which I could apply directly to my work:

- Respond to core themes(i.e. listen attentively, put client's central messages into their own words)
- Recover from misunderstanding (i.e. check your own perceptions with your client)
- Do not pretend to understand (i.e. ask for more information/further clarification)
- and use the time in ways that reflect empathy (i.e. take time before you speak/respond to clients)

Ridley and Upide cultural sensitive guidelines for showing empathy are:

- check yourself for cultural biases and hidden prejudices (i.e. be as objective as possible),
- do not stereotype (i.e. avoid over generalizing about any cultural group)
- explore cultural and racial data into counseling (i.e. personalize the cultural information you get from clients)
- and use cultural schemata (i.e. mental structures that are characteristic of one cultural group but not others).

“A guidance counsellor is successful at showing empathy in intercultural communication when the client leaves the counselling session with the feeling that the counselor has listening and understood her/him.”¹⁶

3. How my practice should take into account the heterogeneous nature of the client group and its diverse needs.

This last question has been answered within the analysis offered in the first and second questions. During counselling, it is crucial to avoid stereotypes and generalizations. Of course, political or economic knowledge of specific countries

¹⁵ Ridley and Upide, 2002.

¹⁶ „Multicultural Guidance and counselling“, Edited by Mika Launikari and Sauli Puukari.

always assists understanding the cases of specific individuals. Besides this, special situation of some clients have to be taken into consideration. Like the situation of refugees and people who went into traumatic experiences.

An important role played as well the communal or collectivist background of the client.

The conclusion to this particular issue is that counsellors should take into consideration the special situation and culture of every client and avoid simplified and straightforward interpretations.