AGDISTIS

'AGDISTIS'- EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND INTERVENTION IN NON-NORMATIVE BEHAVIOUR AND GENDER BULLYING

Training Pills

SEXUAL DIVERSITY AND ACCEPTANCE

Istituto d'Istruzione Superiore
Margherita Hack

INDEPCIE

Colegio Séneca S.Coop.And

SKILL UP CONSULTING TRAINING

MIMAR SINAN DERELI ORTAOKULU • 2013 •

VAEV R&D

Authors

Maria Chiara Di Francesco, Skill Up
Valentina Vinotti, Skill Up

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Module overview

A few years ago, during a work meeting, a good friend of mine had an altercation with a colleague: this lady kept using the term "sexual identity" when talking about gender identity, and refused all of my friend's corrections. It is not that she wanted to be disrespectful or mean: she genuinely *didn't know the difference*.

That this is often the case. Many people have an open and accepting attitude towards LGBTIQ+ topics, but they lack *education and proper information*, maybe due to an age gap, due to misinformation and prejudices still very present in society, or simply due to the fact that they have never had the chance to educate themselves on LGBTIQ+ topics.

If you too find the concepts of sex, gender and sexual identity a bit confusing, then **Module n.1- Gender, Sex and Sexual Orientation: A Guide** is for you.

It is no surpise that some teachers suffer from a gap in training when it comes to non-normative education. Until a few decades ago, queer individuals, much like prominent and powerful women, were pretty much erased by history and, therefore, by education. Their sexual identity was used as a quirk, a trope to justify their struggles, or erased completely. Artists, writers, prominent historical or fictional figures have all suffered from this restricted perspective; and while all of them were so much more than their gender o their preferences, not taking these aspects into consideration has contributed to creating dangerous and incredibly harmful narratives about queer people: that we never existed in the past, or that all life has in store for an openly queer person is esclusion and stigma.

Gender, race and sexual orientation are fundamental parts of every human being's identity, and they shape the way we perceive the world. This realisation has brought forth, in the '70s and '80s, the emerging of "gender studies", which is, the application in all branches of sciences and knowledge of an approach that takes into consideration the way our identity shapes the world and is in turn shaped by it.
Module n.2- The role of narratives in the homophobic prejudices will give you an idea of some very famous examples of queer erasure, and why narratives matter.

Module overview

The same change in mentality and sensitivity that has brought forth gender studies in the '80s has also helped shine a light on the phenomenon at the heart of **AGDISTIS** project, which is bullying. Rivers of ink have been written on the complex dynamics that lie behind bullying- some of these sources, and initiatives taken by some European states to counteract the emergency, can be consulted in the **AGDISTIS Booklet** and in the **AGDISTIS Good Practices Guide** on our **website**. In the end, a bully is a deeply scared and insecure child who has never learnt how not to take their feelings and insecurities out on other people, and rely on a feeling of dominance and to peer's approval for their sense of self-worth. While this is absolutely no excuse for abusive behaviours that cause victims immense pain and sometimes severe trauma, this should also indicate a path to prevent bullying, which is *emotional regulation*.

Teachers, parents and mentors have a key role here, as they can act as role models for their students and pupils, especially when it comes to young children. It is important that teachers learn how to manage their own emotions in order to guide students towards managing theirs.

Acceptance can be a two ways path: on one hand, by teaching children and teenagers how to understand their emotions and how to manage them, educators can foster emotional intelligence, teaching how to deal with insecurity, anger, frustration and fear in a constructive and non-harmful way; on the other hand, an approach based on the understanding and integration of complexity will help children and young adults see that their point of view is often not the only one, and that difference does not mean one thing is right and one thing is wrong, fostering empathy and critical thinking skills. This is why we have developed **Module n.3- A tool for acceptance: emotional resilience** and **Module n.4- Pedagogy of complexity and diversity**.

Whether you're a teacher, a student, a queer person, a parent, a tutor, or simply an interested reader, remember that *we owe each other respect and kindness*. You don't have to agree with someone's identity or choices: people exist regardless of your opinion. But you have a **moral duty to treat all people with dignity**, and to make sure they don't live in fear simply for being who they are.

1 GENDER, SEX AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A GUIDE

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Learning the difference between sex and gender, and between gender and sexual orientation. Although they all contribute to the sense of identity of a person, these elements are not necessarely connected.
- Understanding the experience of people who do not conform to heterosexuality and binary gender norms.
- Raising awareness on the different identities that a teacher could find in their class. Educating themselves strenghtens the role of the teacher as a referring point in the classroom.
- Fostering a sense of acceptance that is based on knowledge and understanding. We all fear what we don't know, so knowing is the first step to understand and accept.

SOFT-SKILLS TOUCHED: difference management, emotional intelligence

1. GENDER, SEX AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A GUIDE

First, let's start with **sex**.

The <u>World Health Organisation</u> defines sex as "*the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones etc.*". So **sex** is a **biological** fact, it refers to our physiological, chromosomic and hormonal assesses, and tends to be binary. *Tends*, because intersex people still exist.

Intersex individuals are born with a set of genitals that does not fit their chromosomic and hormonal asset; they can present both female and male reproductive organs, or a set of chromosomes known as XXY. This genetic alteration is absolutely harmless and intersex individuals are perfectly healthy. It is estimated that 1.7% of the US population falls into this category, so even human biology is never perfectly binary.

> **Remember:** people don't owe you to disclose their identity. Unless you are in a romantic relationship, it is very awkward, inappropriate and uncomfortable to ask people "*what they have in their pants*". You wouldn't want that said to you, would you?

So things get even more nuanced when it comes to **gender**.

Unlike sex, gender has to do with cultural norms and expectations, psychology, perception of self and view of the world. All societies and cultures associate cultural traits with being biologically male or female: we call these traits **gender norms**, and they indicate how it is appropriate to behave, how to regulate relationships with the other gender, how to present (*dress, hair, body hair, jewellery, etc.*), but they also shape our psychological and emotional world, setting expectations, desires, emotional habits, and our own perception of who we are.

For example, being nurturing and caring is traditionally considered a femenine trait associated with women, while men are encouraged to be providers and protectors; women are brought up to be more comfortable with their emotions

than men, or are expected to want marriage and children more than men do, and so on.

Gender is a spectrum: it means that like the colours of the light all blend into one another, so gender identities fall somewhere between strictly male and strictly female in a wide array of nuances and shades.

People whose gender identity corresponds their biological sex are usually referred to as **cis-gender** (from Latin *cis-*, "*on this side*"); people who identify with a different gender than their biological sex are referred to as **trans-gender** (from Latin *trans-*, "*crossing to the other side*").

People who don't feel comfortable identifying with any, or that shift between identities, refer to themselves as **non-binary**, **agender**, **gender fluid** etc. These are all different labels for people that sit somewhere in the spectrum but for different reasons don't feel like being pinned to one end or the other. These people might ask you to refer to them with the pronouns **they**/**them**, to highlight the fact that they don't adhere to strictly male or female identities and gender norms. Please respect their choice of pronoun: remember that what you see on the outside doesn't always correspond to what a person feels inside. **It is very invalidating to be referred to as something we are not**.

If you are a cis-gender individual, try this **quick exercise** with me. Imagine waking up one day in the body of the opposite sex. Imagine not only living physiological functions in that body, but people treating you and expecting you to behave and present as the biological body you have been assigned, and mocking you relentlessly when you can't cope. A pretty jarring and terrifying experience, isn't it? *This is what it feels like for trans people.*

Finally, we come to **sexual identity** or **orientation**. This has to do with our preferences in **romantic and sexual partners**, to whom we fancy and whom we are attracted to.

1. GENDER, SEX AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A GUIDE

Not all languages accomodate non-binary people well. While some languages, like German or English, have neutral or non gendered options, Romance languages on the other hand are more heavily gendered and it is difficult to accomodate people's pronouns when they don't fit a male/female binarism. This happens because languages and linguistic evolution are partially shaped by culture and society.

These are some examples that work in the English language.

- They/them is grammatically neutral in English; it does not convey gender like he/she and it is naturally used by native speakers to refer to people whose gender is unknown

- Person, child, student, young person are all gender neutral options that already exist in the English language

- When referring to non-binary significant others, partner is a gender neutral word

- If you are not sure of how to refer to a trans person, you can use the terms afab or amab: assigned female at birth/ assigned male at birth

1. GENDER, SEX AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A GUIDE

You can use this space to write some options in your native language or languages that can be used to make non-binary or gender fluid people comfortable, or to recount your direct experience with inclusive language.
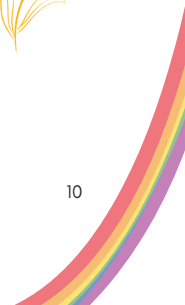
1. GENDER, SEX AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A GUIDE

People who are attracted and have a romantic preference for individuals of the opposite sex and gender are called **heterosexuals** (from Greek *hetero-*, *different*). The vast majority of the world population falls into this category.

> **Remember:** the majority *does not mean* it is natural. The majority of the world population has brown eyes and brown hair: it does not mean it is "*natural*" to have brown eyes and hair and it is "*unnatural*" to be blonde with blue eyes.

The second category in the world is made of people who are attracted and have a romantic preference for individuals of their same sex and gender. These people are referred to as **homosexuals** (from Greek *homo-*, *same*), or *gay*. Depending on the historical moment and cultural context, gay people have been persecuted or mostly left alone, but **they have always existed**.

A third group exists, of people who are attracted to more than one gender. This can mean being attracted to males and females in different ways, or having preferences regardless of or inconsistently with sex and gender. These people are called **bisexuals**. Some individuals feel the label bisexual is not inclusive enough of people who do not identify as strictly male or female, and prefer the word **pansexual** to define themselves. Bisexual and pansexual individuals *are not closeted gay people*: **their identity is valid** and they don't need to come out as gay, nor are they just confused or experimenting.

Finally, the last group is composed of people who don't feel sexual or romantic attraction, or feel it too seldom and too rarely to have a strong preference. These people are called **asexual** and **aromantic**. **Asexuality is a spectrum** too: some people do not want anything to do with sex and/or romantic relietionships at all, some people are only able to develop attraction when they have a strong emotional bond with someone, and some other people simply don't mind. 1% of the world population identifies as asexual: that is 70 million people- *more than the UK population*. Ace/aro people *are not confused nor traumatised*: they are able of creating very strong emotional bonds with partners that do not include sexual activities, or with friends and family members.

2 THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN THE HOMOPHOBIC PREJUDICES

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Understanding the way representation impacts students and pupils' view of themselves. When we don't see the contribution of people who look like us, think like us, or come from our same background, it is easy to feel wrong, alone, and like we don't matter.
- Acknowledging the way either queer contents are erased from school programs, or queer contributors to history and arts are feticised and only remembered because of their sexual orientation. These narratives are harmful to queer kids and to their peers for they foster a sense that being different is wrong.
- Learning more on gender studies and a gender conscious approach.

SOFT-SKILLS TOUCHED: difference management

2. THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN THE HOMOPHOBIC PREJUDICES

Homosexuality has always existed in human history. It has never been, therefore, a problem of *existence*, but a problem of **visibility**.

The words we commonly use for females who are attracted to their own gender is *lesbianism* or *sapphism*: both derive from the poet **Sappho of Lesbo**, a Greek woman who lived in between VII and VI century B.C. She was celebrated as one of the greatest poets of ancient times, together with Alcaeus and Homer, and her love poems are usually directed at women; yet, centuries of literary criticism have denied the evidence, coming to the point of *changing the grammar structure* of her poems to accommodate male love interests.

Another classical example is the fictional character of **Achilles** in the Greek epic poem "*The Iliad*". The exact nature of his relationship with Patroclus has been debated since the ancient times, but the prevalent idea seemed to be that the two were lovers; many great figures of the past, including **Alexander the Great** and Roman emperor **Hadrian**, referenced the Iliad and Achilles' grief when they lost their young, homoerotic companions, cementing the idea that for most of ancient times this relationship was interpreted as homosexual. Yet, most of contemporary scholars keep denying these readings on the grounds that they can't be proved- as if homosexuality needs to be proved to be legitimated; chances are you have heard at least once that Achilles and Patroclus were *just friends*, or like the Hollywood colossal depicted, *cousins.*

The same attitude is reserved to monastic documents from the IX, X and XI century that show monks and nuns using passionate and loving language to address each other. The letters found in the **monastery of Tegernsee**, in Germany, are a collection of love lotters, the veracity of which is still debated; among the collection, two stand out as epistolary conversation in Latin between two women, with one using incredibly tender and passionate phrases and referring to intimate contact with the absent companion. Once again, it should come as no surprise that homosexuality existed in close all-male or all-female communities, but apart from Medievalist **Peter Dronke**, the reading is still often opposed.

2. THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN THE HOMOPHOBIC PREJUDICES

Things don't get better in modern and contemporary history and literature: **Virginia Woolf** had an openly homoerotic relationship with **Vita Sackville-West** for ten years, but her bisexuality is often erased on the basis that she was married to a man, even though the work that is considered her masterpiece, *Orlando: A Biography*, was inspired by and written for Vita.

Josephine Baker and **Djuna Barnes**, two icons of the roaring twenties, were both bisexual: bisexuality and homosexuality was widely more accepted in the *roaring twenties* than one might think.

Legend **Freddie Mercury** was a self-proclaimed bisexual, but he is usually portraited as gay in relation to the fact he contracted HIV, furthering the public erasure of bisexual men- and the hard-to-die prejudice that connects HIV and gay men.

The avant-gardist artist **Andy Wharol** was not only the inventor of pop-art: he was also openly gay.

Poet **Emily Dickinson** was in a life-long relationship with her sister-in-law **Susan Gilbert**, who was also her greatest muse; but the Emily Dickinson Museum in Amherst is known for shying away from any mention of Emily's homosexuality.

The list could continue!

2. THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN THE HOMOPHOBIC PREJUDICES

History and literature are filled with such figures, and with historian and critics attempting any possible explanation but the easiest one. This perspective is usually taken into consideration in a branch of social studies known as **gender studies**. In the wake of postmodernism, gender studies have been working for the last 40 years on the ways society, culture and identity interact, offering to loook at history, literature, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, theology, law, economics, and even the history of natural sciences through the lenses of gender norms and gendered behaviours.

Postmodernism "is an intellectual stance characterized by skepticism towards scientific rationalism and the concept of objective reality" (Aylesworth, 2015). The extremely rapid developments of the 20th century and the global traumas represented by WW2 and its aftermath (including the Cold War) have caused artists and thinkers to reject dogmatic and fixed truths and views of the world in favour of relativisms and extreme subjectivity.

Gender and sexual orientation, just like disability and race, play a fundamental part in shaping our identity and view of the world, and this makes our contribution to the world unique. The **erasure of queerness** from history creates a skewed perspective effect: it looks like queer people never existed in the past, and therefore their existence is challenged in the present. Representation matters for the inverse reason: *what is visible is legitimated.* The anthropologist **Pierre Bourdeau** encapsulates this phenomenon very well when talking of gender divisions: societies that believe in binary gender divisions depict nature accordingly, and then use their interpretation of nature to justify the social order they have created. Societies that are persuaded heterosexuality and gender binarism are the only acceptable identities will keep downplaying and erasing other identities, and using the blank page they have created as proof that these identities never existed in the first place.

This phenomenon happens with other identitarian aspects too, notably with female contributors to history, science and arts, and with mental disabilities. At the same time, people of colour, especially black people, suffer from the same standardisation that is often reserved to queer people: their stories tend to only be told when they are inspirational or painful, furthering the idea that being black, or being gay, reserves nothing but struggle and pain.

2. THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN THE HOMOPHOBIC PREJUDICES

Re-writing narratives means giving space to queerness where it existed, and re-writing the queer experience highlighting the full spectrum of possibilities and experiences: the struggles, yes, but also the achievements, the freedom, the mundanity. These stories deserve to be told, and deserve to be told right.

It is important that queerness is not framed as a mostly painful, dysphoric and guilt-ridden experience, and that **queer youth is encouraged to seek joy in living their own identity openly**.

3 A TOOL FOR ACCEPTANCE: EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

LEARNIING OUTCOMES

- Understanding emotional resilience as the ability to face difficult or challenging situations and emotions
- Learning how to practice emotional management with very simple procedures
- Strenghtening teachers and educators' emotional resilience so that they can guide their students to understand and manage their own emotions
- Highligthing the role of emotional resilience and emotional management in preventing bullying and school violence

SOFT-SKILLS TOUCHED: emotional intelligence, empathy, self-awareness, communication

3. A TOOL FOR ACCEPTANCE: EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Emotional resilience refers to the ability to successfully cope with traumas and negative situations. In general, it is the ability to **navigate complicated, stressful or painful events** without breaking down. It's a skill connected to *emotional intelligence* and *emotional management*, i.e. the ability to understand and process your feelings and the feelings of others.

Numerous studies prove that bullies take out on others, those who are perceived as more vulnerable, their own insecurities, wounds and negative feelings: tearing others down makes them feel protected and strong, especially when they feel the victim cannot retaliate. Teaching your class **emotional resilience** can help all students become more comfortable with their own vulnerabilities and their own feelings; higher self-acceptance means higher acceptance of differences.

Emotional management is composed of many elements:

1. Feel the emotions:
Before they are in the head, emotions are in the body, manifesting with a wide array of symptoms including changes in heartbeat, body temperature, face expression and body language. Understanding how emotions show up in your body will help you
- identify them: for example, if you feel a sudden hot rush to your head and to your face, you are clearly angry or ashamed.
- accept them: emotions are like the weather, they come and they go. It's important to learn not to react to the immediate stimulus, but to feel it and allow it to pass before acting or making decisions.
- identify them in others: familiarity with your emotions and your body language will allow you to recognise how your students are feeling, detecting what they might not feel safe enough or brave enough to say out loud.
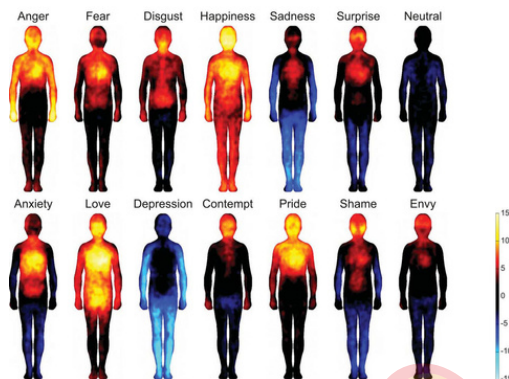
3. A TOOL FOR ACCEPTANCE: EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

> *"The act of naming allows you to see yourself as an agent, experiencing a recognizable feeling, instead of being a passive victim of the feeling"*
> – L. Geenberg

2.Name the emotion:

Once you recognise how the emotion is manifesting in your body, you can give it a name. This is important in order to understand what is causing the emotion. Emotions are signals- think of them like little lights on a dashboard, signalling you what is working and what is not in your situation. Anger might mean that a boundary has been crossed and you feel disrespected; chronic stress might mean that you are exhausting your energies; anxiety is a sign that you don't feel safe and in control, and so on.

Naming the emotion allows you to understand it, and understanding it allows you to make changes accordingly.

3.Forget about good and bad emotions.

A thing like good emotions or bad emotions does not exist. Emotions don't have a moral value, they are just neutral signals from the body and mind. The only distinction that matters is between **adaptive** or "healthy" feelings, and **maladaptive** or "unhealthy" feelings.

For example, anger at someone insulting you openly or mistreating you is very healthy and adaptive: that anger is there to protect you from a menace. Anger at someone who is different or has different ideas is unhealthy, as that person is doing nothing to threaten you, and the anger is misplaced.

Same goes with stress: stress is a natural hormonal response that is responsible for the fight or fly reflex; it has kept humans alive in situations of danger for thousands and thousands of years. But feeling stress in your daily life is maladaptive and a clear sign your body is exhausted and is perceiving harmless routines and places as a threat worth of the "fight or fly" reaction.

Applied to education, it is important that your pupils understand that the emotions they are feeling, all of them, are natural and shouldn't be suppressed, nor should they feel ashamed of them. But not all emotions are adaptive, and acting on every single emotional stimulus is incredibly dangerous and harmful. A student's insecurity, or their desire to fit in with the group, is natural and legitimate; it becomes maladaptive when it is used as an excuse for harming others.

3. A TOOL FOR ACCEPTANCE: EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

4.Embrace vulnerability.

Unhealthy feelings or unjustified emotional reactions are almost always a cover up for intense situations of distress and fear. Like a puffer fish, some emotional outbursts make us look big because, in reality, we feel very small. It is fundamental to learn how to **embrace vulnerability** with ourselves. This entails being honest about how we feel without pushing feelings away.

Vulnerability is scary and it can be very painful: it is painful for a young pupil to admit they don't feel worthy of their peers, or that their self-worth is dependent on external approval, or that they don't feel seen and heard in their family. It's also scary because we are well aware it might be used against us: that's why insecure students often recur to striking first, or to intimidation.

Yet vulnerability is not only the key to a **healthy emotional life**, but the gate to deeply knowing ourselves and growing into ourselves. It is important to present a healthy dose of vulnerability as a super power, as something to embrace in order to get in touch with who we are, with our needs and desires. Vulnerability entails pain, as we will be more likely to get hurt: but pain, as well, is a natural part of life that, if managed and not passively endured, can lead to **growth**.

5.Respond, do not react

Quick and intense emotions make us prone to quick and emotional reactions that can be very harmful for others. For example, if we are already stressed and angry our first instinct might to snap at someone who has slightly bothered us, even though they have nothing to do with our frustrations; if we feel angry, our instinctual reaction might be lashing out, screaming or hitting things.

All these reactions, albeit normal, show poor emotional management and emotional resilience, and can become extremely hurtful for those on the other side. Instead, a crucial skill to learn is to **wait**- the very well known "count to 10 before speaking". Waiting will allow you to let the first instinct pass, so that you **do not react, but you respond**. A response is a deliberate choice: it's aware and -hopefully- controlled, and it's based on the understanding of both the situation and the emotions involved, not on the instinct. Waiting -counting to 10- before acting or speaking allows the first wave of emotion to pass, leaving time for **evaluation**: did this person really mean to hurt me? Am I angry with them, or am I re-directing my feelings on them? Is what they did worth the reaction I am having? What are the consequences if I do this and that?

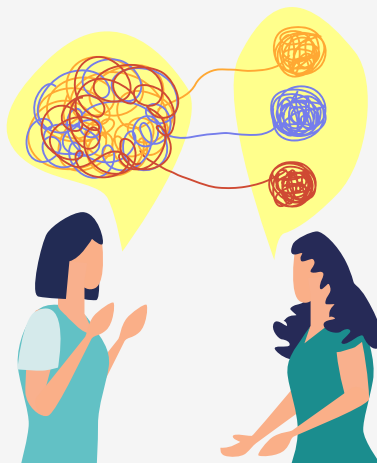# 3. A TOOL FOR ACCEPTANCE: EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

6.Express the way you feel

Ultimately, the most effective instrument for emotion management is dialogue.

- Speak with a trusted person: this can help you identify the meaning of your emotions, or just prove a valid vent valve for when you can't change the situation. Speaking with a friend or a parent doesn't have to be about receiving advice or solutions: something just being heard and listened to is enough. Remember that you can always confide in a specialist: ask your school if they have a therapist or counsellor that you can speak with if you feel the need to.

- Speak up about the way you feel: when you think you have understood your emotions and your emotional reactions, dialogue is always a good form of response, as it connects us with others. This is an occasion to let people know how you feel, what your needs are, but also an occasion to see their perspective, which might be very different from what you imagine.
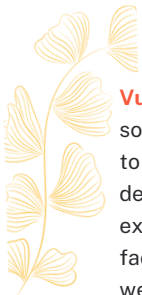
These passages might be useful to manage your feelings while doing your job, and to guide your students to be **more open and more accepting** of their own feelings.

Fear and insecurity are normal reactions in front of what we don't know or in front of what's different. Denying this means being willfully blind when they manifest. But fear and insecurity are part of life: these emotions need to be *navigated*, not suppressed, and not taken out on others. Increasing your **emotional resilience** can help you become a positive role model for your students and guide them to accepting their feelings too. Vulnerability can be scary and confusing; it's much easier to take it out on other people, avoiding looking inward and facing hard feelings. But your students are *capable of doing hard things.*

3. A TOOL FOR ACCEPTANCE: EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE
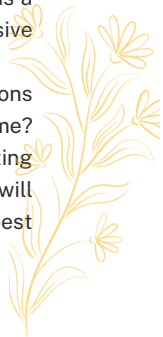
What is vulnerability?

Vulnerability is a dynamic and relative concept, as it depends on the social and cultural context and the person's ability to deal with threats to their identity or feelings at a given time. **Vulnerability** varies depending on one's state of mind, relationships with others, and past experiences. It is not a stable attribute of a person. In general, the factors that make us vulnerable depend on the type of stressful event we have experienced, the psychological support we have, our ability to react to the event, and a number of personal psychological characteristics.

Vulnerability is the sphere in which violence receives its first legitimisation. The violence that makes us vulnerable can be verbal (someone insulting us or associating us with a category different from the one we feel we belong to), physical (someone touching our body in a way we do not want to be touched) and relational (someone excluding us, separating us, marginalizing us or literally making us invisible).

Vulnerability is therefore first and foremost exogenous, it is largely determined by external factors whose reiteration affects emotional vulnerability.

Emotional vulnerability, in turn, presents itself as a state of imbalance that can make the person more impulsive and more susceptible to events considered normal. The emotionally vulnerable person also has a greater intolerance of injustice that may manifest itself in aggressive behaviour, social anxiety or dangerous paths of self-exclusion.

By developing the ability to put facts, events and offending actions through an emotional sieve - what value does this fact have for me? why? how important is the person who offended me? is it worth reacting aggressively or is detachment better? who can I ask for help? - one will find the cognitive and behavioural ways of reacting and coping best suited to the situation and one's personal qualities.

4 PEDAGOGY OF COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understanding what the theory and pedagogy of complexity is and the studies that have led to its elaboration.
- Understanding the role of the theory of complexity in the development of critical thinking abilities.
- Understanding the benefits that a complex approach can have in fostering acceptance of diversities in a classroom.

SOFT-SKILLS TOUCHED: diversity management, critical thinking

4. PEDAGOGY OF COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY

«The knowledge of the parts is not enough; the knowledge of the whole as a whole is not enough, if one ignores its parts; one is thus brought to make a come and go in loop to gather the knowledge of *the whole and its parts*».

This is the basis of the **theory of complexity** as explained by **Morin**. It means rejecting a compartmentalised view of knowledge and pedagogy in favour of an approach that integrates single parts, narratives and phenomena into a wider framework, without losing sight of specificity.
Instead of favouring a bigger picture that does not take into account nuances and differences, and instead of focusing on one specific element at a time, a pedagogy of complexity enhances *the relationships and the processes* between the general and the particular, the whole and its parts. This approach can be particulalry rewarding when **managing diversity** in a classroom.

-**Awareness of different perspectives**: understanding that reality is composed of smaller narratives, that these narratives can all be true and fit in the same context at the same time, and that they all contribute to painting a bigger and nuanced picture. The point of embracing different perspectives is *not* to determine who is right and who is wrong, but to understand that *many things can be true at the same time* depending on the perspective used.

Ex. A pupil can be going through a phase of discovery of their gender identity and of their sexuality, and find out after a while that they just wanted to experiment and they feel more comfortable with their assigned gender and/or with a heterosexual orientation. This *does not mean* that all students that come out as non-binary, trans or gay are going through a phase and will grow out of it with time.

A mindset trained in complexity is necessary in order to harmonise the different identities and perspectives in the classroom. Students might not only have different sexual and gender orientation, but different religious believes, ethnic identities, and political ideas. The balance between freedom of expression for all of your students and the necessary respect and safety for all is a thin line that requires the ability to integrate. **Finding common grounds**, **fostering respect even when we don't agree**, and **normalising differences** are all ways to apply complexity theory.
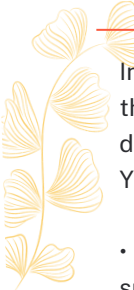
4. PEDAGOGY OF COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY

-**Collaboration and diversity**: opening to different perspectives and experiences as a way to learn from each other and to enrich our perception and knowledge of the world. We all bring our unique contribution to the world. The point of diversity is trying to include as many experiences as possible as a way to get in touch with different aspects of the same reality- much like the shades of the same colour, or the different colours of the light.

> **Our perspective is so unique because so many factors influence our view of the world: our *race*, our *sexual identity*, our *gender identity*, our *religious believes*, our *social status*, our *family history*, our *temperament*, our *passions and interests*. A dialogue that takes these elements into consideration is an enriching one.**

-**Critical thinking**: a pedagogic approach that is rooted in complexity helps develop critical thinking, as it encourages **flexibility** and **adaptability**. It has been studied that students who were taught the theory of complexity had a greater ability to transpose their knowledge and skills from a field to the other, finding creative solutions to problems and creating new connections between areas and topics.
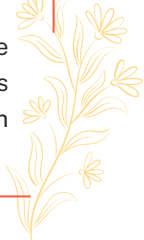
In small groups, invite students to get curious and deepen their understanding of where hate speech and discriminatory behaviours come from, what it is and isn't. You can assign each group to answer questions like:

• Who decides what is hate speech/discrimination: the speaker or the recipient?
• What is the difference between teasing, sarcasm, insulting, and hate speech?
• Does the intention of the speaker matter?
• Is stereotyping the same as discriminating?
• Does a victim of hate speech have the right to use it to fight back?

Have each group lead a discussion about their topic. Once all of these discussions are finished, develop a class definition of hate speech, including how it differs from other kinds of hurtful talk.

REMARKS AND CONCLUSION

As you saw, *sex*, *gender* and *sexual identity* are not the same thing. Sometimes they are connected, sometimes they are not, and this makes room for incredible **richness and diversity** in our experience as teachers and as human beings. In the end, **all individuals want to be loved, accepted and respected**. Everyone has a right to feel safe and to live according to their own truth. Your responsibility as a teacher is not to tell your students who they are, but to give them the right instruments and enough space to find out themselves. That is what **e-ducare** means in Latin: *to bring forth, to bring out*.

And even if that turns out to be a phase, it is okay to change our mind about what we like and who we are, especially when we are very young. It is important to leave youth **freedom to explore** and to understand what works and what doesn't for them.

Self-discovery will be easier if your students have **positive role models** to refer to. Remember that **representation** of all identities and of all backgrounds matters, as it makes people feel seen. As a teacher, you are a role model for your students too: this is a responsability that requires you to set the standard for **acceptance and empathy** in your classes.

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PROJECT NUMBER: 2022-1-ES01-KA220-SCH-000087432