

Exploring Diversity: Six-Modules for Academic Courses and Professional Training



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Introduction

This booklet contains six innovative teaching modules for training students in the helping professions (such as social work, counseling, therapy, education, psychology) to cope effectively with diversity through a deep understanding of “self” and “other” based on an awareness of context, complexity, self-reflection and the ability to cope with human differences.

The modules, presented here as teaching units to be incorporated into academic courses, are also recommended for use in training sessions for professionals working with people in multicultural societies. The modules have been developed as an outcome of the DEMO project NEVET’s training group at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. We hope to foster a personal and meaningful learning process that enables students and trainees to connect to both their own and other people’s perspectives, stories and life experiences.



*Demo participants



DEMO Project

DEMO is a capacity building project funded by the European Commission, Erasmus + program, initiated and coordinated by Professor Julia Mirsky, of The Spitzer Department of Social Work at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. DEMO comprises eleven academic institutions in Israel and in Europe, two NGOs and over sixty participants.

DEMO aspires to advance innovative teaching about migrants' lives in Israeli higher education institutions, with the aim of improving the skills of professionals in the applied social sciences (teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, etc.) so that they can better meet the needs of migrants and asylum seekers.

Visit our website: <https://www.demo.erasmus-il.org/>

NEVET Greenhouse

NEVET is an international and multidisciplinary research and training venue at the Hebrew University's School of Social Work that serves as a greenhouse for capacity building of young scholars and practitioners. NEVET aims to develop knowledge, inform policy and promote context-informed perspectives on children and families for professionals and services working with families and young children in multicultural and international contexts.

Children and families in need are a worldwide concern that crosses cultural boundaries. The premise for NEVET is that a deep understanding of families and children's well-being requires a context-informed multidisciplinary perspective. According to this view, various families and children's needs should be assessed and treated with knowledge, respect and sensitivity to the contexts in which they occur.

Visit our website: <https://en.sw.huji.ac.il/book/nevet-greenhouse-context-informed-research-and-training-children-need>

Chapter 1: Context Informed Perspective

Our interactions with other people, in personal or professional capacities, are based on our perceptions of reality, shaped by our cultures and life experiences. Common concepts such as risk and protection, normativity, development and attachment, learning and caregiving and personal and group identity, carry deep implications for professional behavior and decision making. And yet each of these concepts can be defined and understood in various ways, dependent on contexts of time and place, culture, professional discourses, social, political and economic power relations (Roer-Strier & Nadan, 2020; Nadan, 2017). People experience and construct their different realities within their contexts (Askeland & Døhlie, 2015). Professional development involves reflectivity through becoming aware of our own assumptions as well as alternative meanings. An understanding of context refers both to our own contexts as people and as professionals, and the contexts influencing the people we work with. A social context is created by people, and people are formed by their social contexts. A person never exists in a void, but always in a context. Contexts are complex because they change constantly over time, as do human beings. Context means a set of circumstances or facts that surround and contribute to the full meaning of an event or situation (Askeland & Døhlie, 2015).

Based on the research conducted by the NEVET group, the following context-informed perspective has been developed (Roer-Strier & Nadan, 2020):

People, families and communities live their lives in a matrix of diverse contexts including culture, religion, class, race, gender, nationality, socio-political context and more. These contexts shape the development of individuals and families as well as frame life circumstances and opportunities. Contexts also influence the construction of meanings given to different events and experiences in the lives of individuals and families. Contexts are not fixed and static, they depend on place and time and are therefore subject to change. Contexts intersect and influence each other in complex ways.

The context-informed perspective invites professionals to consider the different relevant contexts at play (such as: culture, ethnicity, religiosity, spirituality, socioeconomic status, citizenship status and community life) when working with children and families of immigrant or minority communities. Considering context involves a deep understanding of people's past and present life experiences and enables us to form a more realistic and holistic perspective. This approach can have great significance on our professional understanding, for example in assessing risk for children or choosing appropriate teaching methodologies or other forms of practical interventions with families and communities. Context is relevant to all people, but becomes especially important when



dealing with immigrants, since often the cultural transition becomes the focus while other contexts are inadvertently ignored. And yet culture does not work on its own or in a vacuum, but in transaction with other variables at other ecological levels (Korbin, 2002).

A context-informed perspective is based on the following key concepts:

Complexity:

According to the context-informed perspective, awareness of context helps us view the complexity of a constantly evolving reality. Knowledge alone is no longer the basis of expertise. Context-informed training programs focus on what people need to *be aware of*, including their own preconceptions and biases and an in-depth understanding of “self and other”. Built into this process is a new underlying premise of professionalism, in order to be an expert you cannot *know* everything, but you do need to have an acceptance of complexity and unpredictability, and a willingness to *constantly discover*.

A professional who is open to discovery will enter an encounter with a fellow human being from a *not-knowing position* coupled with the intention of asking questions. The curiosity to listen before forming an opinion, and desire to create a working partnership, together facilitate a mutually meaningful process of learning and exploring.

We live in a world where an abundance of knowledge is readily available on-line, but there is no alternative to the power of human contact to heal or inspire; an ability that is dependent on connection, empathy, trust and belief in human agency. The professionals of the future do not need to recite theories, they need to be able to adapt and adjust to constantly changing complex realities.

Transition:

In a world in which many people no longer live their lives in their birthplace, transition (by choice or force of circumstance) has become a significant and powerful factor in many people’s lives. The reasons for the transition, the age that it occurred and the circumstances surrounding it (often traumatic and including painful separation and loss) are life changing. The experiences in the new location, legal status (and right to citizenship), financial situation and support networks, as well as experiences of acceptance or rejection all contribute to ease or complicate people’s ability to adjust and adapt following transition. All these factors interact together to form the context of transition and in time they shape personal and family history. It is important to include an understanding of these processes in professional training in both introspective (the life stories of the participants themselves) and empathic (the life stories of others) ways. The context informed perspective makes these realities visible and significant both in

training (as participants discover each other's stories) and in the professional field (as participants develop sensitivity to the context of transition and the after effects on individuals, families and communities).

Hybridity:

One of the results of these transitions is an increased human diversity as an incredibly significant characteristic of current and future reality. Another outcome is that the connection between culture and birthplace has been unraveled. The meeting of people originating in different cultural contexts transcends designated spaces which is understandable within context, relationships and meanings created by interactions (Gupta & Ferguson, 2016). The interplay of different cultures is not only happening *between* people, but also *within* people. Hybridity (Bennet-Martinez, Leu, & Lee 2002, 2006; Roer-Strier & Ben-Ezra, 2006) is especially potent in countries like Israel, characterized by mass immigration. This has two consequences for diversity training: firstly, there are no longer distinctly definable differentiated ethnic groups, and secondly, there are many people with multiple identities. Thus as our understanding of hybridity broadens, it is possible to see culture as a mosaic of customs, beliefs and perceptions, thereby changing our concept of differentiated ethnic cultures to a complex view of reality in which all cultures are varied and their different combinations still create even more variations and differences. Widening our perspectives to perceive this complexity is an important part of training in the helping professions. Culture becomes one context among many influencing contexts, alongside gender, economics, history, politics, power relations, discrimination and exclusion (Roer-Strier, 2016).

Intersectionality:

As we begin to look at reality through an awareness of different contexts, it soon becomes apparent that they overlap and intersect in people's lives. Intersectionality is a conceptual framework for understanding the ways in which aspects of human identity (such as gender, race and socioeconomic status) simultaneously interact and intersect to shape lived experiences and life chances through interlocking systems of bias and inequality that exist at the macro social-structural level (i.e. sexism, racism, classism), (Crenshaw, 1989). At the micro individual level, categories of difference such as gender, age, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status are understood not as independent dimensions of human diversity but rather as interconnected and in interaction with each other (McCall, 2005). These micro intersections and subjectively lived experiences are influenced by macro social structures (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). On the macro social-structural level, systems of power and oppression are not mutually exclusive and can exacerbate or compound one another over time. Due to the simultaneous operation of micro and macro social processes, structures and dynamics, human lives cannot be



understood through a single-factor explanation (for example based on race, gender or socioeconomic status) but rather must be seen as multidimensional and complex (Nadan, Spilsbury, & Korbin, 2015). Whereas intersectionality started with categories of race, gender and socio-economic status, later scholars have broadened their analyses to other categories of difference such as age, mental health, disability, sexual orientation, religion and geographic location (Nadan & Korbin, 2018).

Power-Relations:

A significant part of the complexity described above involves an understanding of underlying power relations in all social systems and human interactions. In every society there are excluded minority groups who live under personal, institutional, legal and structural forces that restrict, oppress, humiliate and prevent them from obtaining equal access to resources and opportunities (Sisneros et al., 2008).

Becoming aware of the existence and effects of privilege, inclusion and exclusion is part of the perception of a complex reality. The matrix of power-relations in society is often unspoken, yet a prevalent influence in people's lives. It is often apparent between different segments of society: the majority in relation to minorities, the established natives in relation to new immigrants or displaced persons, as well as the manifestation of power relations between gender and age groups as part of family and social hierarchy. When working with families in transition, this broader view can foster deeper understanding of the complexity of their situation, as well as empathy rather than judgmental attitudes.

Examining these issues as part of professional context-informed training encourages trainees to explore their own identities and social positioning and the ways in which these shape their assumptions, attitudes and images with regard to the "other" (Nadan & Stark, 2017). Such reflection can facilitate the acknowledgement of the ways in which fears, stereotypes and "isms" (racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, ageism, classism, etc.) influence attitudes, beliefs and feelings. It also encourages awareness of work-related power relations and their influence on the professional-client relationship, providing the means to address unspoken identities that inadvertently shape interactions (Watts-Jones, 2010).

Chapter 2: NEVET's Context-Informed Training Program

The following modules were developed between 2017-2020 by a group of NEVET scholars and doctoral students from diverse personal, cultural and academic backgrounds. All of the group members were involved in context-informed academic research and came from a variety of academic disciplines and professional fields, such as social work, psychology, anthropology, folklore, education, counseling and others. This proved to be a valuable asset to our exploration and discussions, creating a unique perspective on families and individuals in transition and the appropriate ways that professionals can be helpful to them, with practical implications regarding the aims of the modules and suitable methodologies for effective training. The group shared a strong desire to make their academic research significant to the professional world and continue to explore diversity through workshops and training in the fields of social work, education, psychology and counseling.

Some words of caution concerning any training regarding culture or context awareness: firstly, change involves a process of understanding, which requires time and experience. A one-time lecture, however good it is, is unlikely to create real change. Secondly, talking about “culture” often does not incorporate the full complexity of the subject and may create generalizations that lead to the opposite effect than that intended (by strengthening stereotypes rather than refuting them).

The social services and educational institutions in Israel function in an extremely diverse human environment, which has consequences for professional encounters and the quality of services or education received by participants. Encounters between professionals and service users from diverse backgrounds may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. In order for professionals to be able to work effectively with clients of differing cultural, religious, ethnic and other backgrounds, they would benefit from training that explores areas of conflict. This includes genuine self-reflection, critical thinking and a re-evaluation of basic assumptions of service givers and receivers about concepts such as normative parenting, functional family, an enriching childhood, risk and protection of children and the meaning of ‘home’ for families in transition. An awareness of complexity includes the ability to reflect on our blind spots, biases, stereotypes and power relations and perceive hybridity and intersectionality.

The group developed the following six modules of creative methods (presented below) to facilitate active learning and discussion about these issues with immediate practical implications to the field.



NEVET training
program sessions



Chapter 3: Guidelines and Challenges for Context-Informed Training

Self-Reflection

Reflection is considered part of both clinical and research processes and is a powerful personal and professional tool. Reflection is generally referred to as an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge (Dewey, 1993). More recent definitions suggest that reflectivity involves the constant movement between being in the phenomena and stepping outside of it; this involves active and conscious processes that emphasize this dual position of both identifying with the phenomenon and examining it (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011).

People take courses and come to training sessions with different expectations, but many are used to the concept of knowledge coming from the experts and are surprised, and sometimes even annoyed, when asked to participate in introspective exercises. However, based on our experience with context-informed training, we recommend including elements of self-reflection, analysis of case studies from the field and self-understanding and awareness, in addition to the knowledge and research findings, thereby combining emotional, experiential learning with intellectual understanding. As participants examine values and perspectives formed in the context of their own lives, it enables them to face their own assumptions and biases by reflecting on and deconstructing social and professional concepts and normative assumptions that are often taken for granted. As one participant put it: *"I found myself opening up to a new kind of learning; my thinking became much more flexible following this course, and I now see things differently."* To allow a process of reflectivity, trainers need patience and compassion in order to respectfully contain resistance and encourage the sharing of acquired insights.

Safety First

Another important issue in context-informed training is that of creating a safe space in the classroom to enable open discussions of potentially volatile issues. In Israel, participants in many professional encounters are heterogeneous, leading to great opportunities to explore and discuss contexts. However, discussions focusing on personal and group identity, a sense of belonging, the meaning of 'home', social and political topics (especially relating to bias), stereotypes and prejudices, minorities, immigrants and displaced persons can arouse deep emotions and are potentially explosive (Nadan & Ben-Ari, 2015). In order to turn diverse views into assets, the participants need to feel safe and sure that their views will be listened to and appreciated.



Recommended ground rules for classroom discussions:

- ◆ Participants talk about themselves (not about others)
- ◆ No generalizations: participants are regarded as individuals and not as representatives of groups
- ◆ Mutual respect; honest and generous listening
- ◆ Recognizing that listening to and even understanding somebody with a different opinion does not cancel one's own opinion or require agreement
- ◆ A declaration that our purpose in this type of approach is to learn from each other and not embarrass anyone

At the beginning of each training workshop, we recommend discussing and clarifying safety rules and referring to them in later meetings as necessary. The Israeli reality means that meetings often take place during intensely emotional situations. The ability to share feelings and experiences in class can be a unique, if precarious, platform for learning, which requires careful management of class interactions. Sometimes intense, volatile disagreements can be valuable opportunities for learning, beginning with introspection (using the shock-meter, see module 2 below), and the ability to connect as a group through common humanity and to be empathic and respectful, even when in dispute. It is important to be aware of students' reactions to what is happening in the training, often expressed through body language and silence, and not necessarily verbalized. Sometimes students from minority groups are hesitant to voice their opinions in class and require encouragement and reassurance. Presenting their views as an asset that usually is unavailable to other participants, encourages group support and interest. Once they voice their story or thoughts and are listened to, the experience is often very empowering.

This type of "intimate" learning requires small groups of fifteen to twenty participants, which is not always possible. There are several ways of coping with large classes, either by conducting exercises in pairs or small groups or inviting a colleague to jointly facilitate a discussion.

The Evolving Learning Context

The sequence of the exercises is designed to move gradually from the personal to the communal, from the individual to the social and from personal reflection to open class discussions. The process is different between different groups, and combines a parallel learning process for us as trainers: all of the methodologies below have been used

repeatedly in different contexts, adapted and changed for different audiences, evolved and refined repeatedly as we ourselves gain further insights. There does not seem to be a point at which we can say that we have understood the whole picture, since the picture is constantly changing, this is part of the challenge.

Each new group influences our consideration of new contexts. For example, a group member who lives in a settlement close to the border with Gaza commented that our context-map (see module 5) did not include the issue of security. Another member conducted research with the Bedouin community living in unrecognized villages in the Negev, where basic resources such as electricity and running water are unavailable. She emphasized historical and political contexts, as well as access to medical and educational services. Another example concerns our perceptions of the family and where we should place our focus when working with children at risk – on the child as an individual or on the child as a family member. A social worker who works with children in boarding schools commented that our context-game diagram with the child in the center is an example of what is wrong with social work orientation that commonly focuses on the child as an individual, rather than as part of a family, and that this is detrimental to both the child and the family. Following this discussion, we changed the context-game to include two options: a family-oriented perspective, incorporating a discussion of what we mean by family, or an individual-oriented perspective. It is possible that in a different group a community model rather than a family model might be preferable.

We suggest creating a double lens process in which participants examine themselves and others in context, while examining the contexts and forces influencing them.

Language:

The language people use is both a reflection of the reality in which they live and an active means of creating this reality (Duranti, 1997; Ochs, 1996, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). Becoming aware of social bias, stereotyping and exclusion necessitates developing a new awareness of how we use language. Some of the words commonly used are detrimental to creating a safe context, and although some participants may disagree, it is important to respectfully highlight them when used, for learning purposes. Here are some examples of commonly used potent and 'dangerous' words:

Primitive, underdeveloped - words that may be applied to technology or software, but when used regarding nations, cultures or people carry distinct connotations of implicit inferiority, implying the existence of a hierarchy of value between these.



Race, ethnicity - words often used interchangeably to define ‘categories’ of people, as if people can be divided and perhaps evaluated accordingly. And yet today we know that these are social, not biological constructs which need to be used with caution and openly discussed when relevant.

Mentality - associated generally with race, ethnicity or culture, and inferring that people are ‘wired differently’ according to the above, rather than socialized in context. According to the context-informed perspective, people are complex and dynamic; their perceptions, thinking and worldview are influenced by many factors. The use of the word ‘mentality’ implies a deterministic static view, regarding people’s thought processes as fixed by their origins, rather than constantly evolving and changing throughout their life experiences.

Infiltrators, aliens, foreigners, foreign workers – words used to describe people who do not belong or are unwanted simply because of where they came from and how they arrived (perhaps illegally) regardless of who they are. During the history of the world, many people have become displaced persons due to human conflicts or natural disasters. These terms are derogatory and exclusive, as opposed to terms that may arouse compassion such as asylum seeker, migrant or guest worker, immigrant or displaced persons.

There is no intention here of encouraging ‘politically correct’ conversation, the idea is to honestly and openly examine how we talk about ‘other’ people, to develop an awareness of the potency of language in creating reality, forming identities and influencing thought processes. The purpose of the lecturer or trainer here is not to criticize the participants for the words they use, but rather to encourage self and group reflection about these words – what are the social, personal and collective outcomes and consequences of using this phrase rather than another? How do people in the class relate to these words and phrases?

Chapter 4: The Modules

First Module: The Identity Puzzle¹

Why use the identity puzzle?

Understanding identity is regarded as a fundamental basis for “self” and “other” awareness. Using this exercise at the beginning of a course or training is a powerful and effective way of getting to know the participants and the ways in which they define themselves and want others to view them. The exercise aids in both personal reflection and group discussion on the issue of identities. Often the identities of students in the classroom have an invisible, sometimes volatile, presence without being openly discussed. They are ‘the invisible elephants’ in the room, present in every situation in our lives, triggering reactions and counter-reactions disguised as something else. Starting a course or a training program with an open examination of the identities’ participants choose to present is to remove potential invisible barriers between different social groups and give legitimacy to self-definition and the presence of diversity. The identity puzzle exercise carefully takes the participants through a process of discovery from the personal to the collective.

When is it useful?

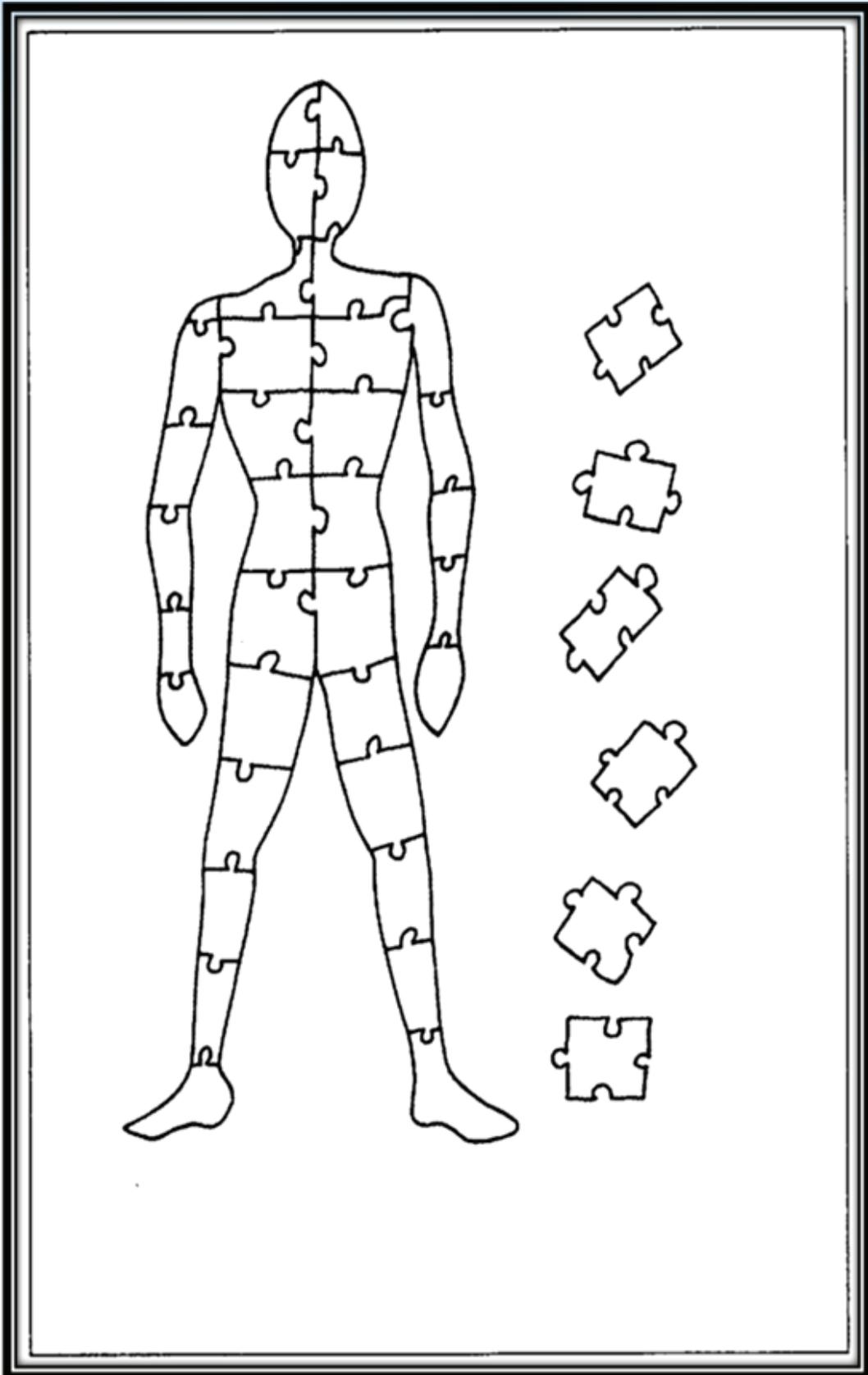
The identity puzzle exercise is useful as an introductory assignment, pre-empting a discussion of identities, hybridity, intersectionality, and social locations, including issues of privilege and oppression in society and how these effect people. The exercise puts the participants at the center, beginning the course with an introspective examination of themselves. As primary participants in this exercise, students transform from passive receptors of knowledge to active contributors in an on-going process of reflection, exploration, definition, and discussion that can henceforth accompany the learning process throughout the course.

How to use the identity puzzle:

There are several stages to this exercise:

1. The identity puzzle:

All students are given a blank copy of the picture below - a human figure divided into puzzle pieces. Ask the students to write their own identities in the puzzle pieces, starting with their birth-related identities: cultural heritage, origins of parents and grandparents, cultural backgrounds, family-related identities (such as daughter, son, sibling, grandchild, etc.) and then to include acquired identities like professions (such as teacher, social worker, student), followed by families newly created (for example:



wife, husband, parent, single-parent, etc.) and personal qualities (such as tall, religious, tennis player, shy, etc.). Alternatively, students can simply be asked to fill in the identities that they currently hold close to their hearts. It is important to give legitimacy to their personal choices as it is their own self-definition. In order to make them comfortable with the exercise, it is important to state that they will not be asked to hand in their own puzzles or share information they do not want to be made public. In the picture, beside the puzzle-person are several loose puzzle pieces. Ask the students to write in these pieces the identities they wish to acquire in the future (for example: a degree, a new job parenthood, etc.).

2. Discussing the exercise in class:

If you have a small group of students who are used to open class discussions, this can be done in the plenary session, whereas if the group is large or the students are not likely to share openly in the plenary session, this can be done in pairs or small groups.

Questions to guide the discussion:

- What feelings arose during the exercise?
- Was it difficult? Why?
- Is there any identity you put forgot to put in your puzzle that surprised you? Why?
- What insights did it lead to?
- How would your definitions of your identities have been different five years ago, and five years from now?
- Which identities would you give up if you could?
- How difficult will it be to attain these aspired identities?
- Can you see meaning in the situation of your different identities on the puzzle?

3. Social location:

After the different identities in the room have been recognized and discussed, the social location exercise can be introduced. As discussed in the introduction, the interaction of gender, ethnicity and social status in the lives of individuals is today recognized as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Stemming from this is the concept of ‘social location’ – a person’s position vis-à-vis systems of privilege, discrimination or disadvantage in the private and public spheres.

Define a place in the room (such as the center) to symbolize the “center” –a location where society’s resources (education, welfare, medicine, finances, etc.) are accessible. The walls (or a predefined line) symbolize the margins of society, where these resources are scarce. Ask the students to position themselves in the room in relation to these two points (near the center if they feel they have access to resources, near the walls if they



do not, or anywhere in-between). Ask students to explain why they chose where they are standing and how they feel about it. Discuss how the different identities in the class are positioned in relation to each other, what does this mean? Discuss subjectivity: the feeling of being privileged or marginalized – what is this dependent upon? Can we be both?

What does the identity puzzle make us aware of?

The identity puzzle exercise makes us aware of the complexity of identities: identity is both multiple and dynamic. The exercise emphasizes the interplay of the personal and the social, the question of self-definition versus others' definition and stereotyping. It also focusses on the power of identity in social and professional interactions, and raises issues of privilege and oppression, power-relations and access to resources. Students become aware of the effect of social structures on the individual, the meaning of marginality and detachment and resistance to such social structures and forces. When introducing new concepts into the course, such as intersectionality and hybridity, it is advisable to ask the students to refer back to their own identity puzzles and see if they can recognize these concepts in their own identities or those of their colleagues.

Challenges & pitfalls when using the identity puzzle

Defining one's own identity puzzle pieces can bring to the surface unsolved personal identity dilemmas or painful past formative experiences, such as being divorced or widowed, life-transitions, experiences of social rejections and such-like. There may be students who are adopted or have transformed their gender or religious identities or have other issues which make the exercise challenging for them. A degree of sensitivity is required to student's emotional responses to the puzzle, their ability to publicly share personal information and be willing to enter openly into the discussion. Likewise, the social location exercise can make some students feel uncomfortable, as issues of privilege and oppression become openly apparent, and some students may feel the need to justify their social status or become apologetic. In these situations, it is important for the lecturer to maintain the safe space, not force participation, and enhance legitimacy for students' feelings while maintaining an amicable atmosphere.

Second Module: The Shock-Meter

Why use the shock-meter?

Classroom discussions on sensitive issues in a heterogeneous group can cause elevated emotional reactions. The shock-meter metaphor was proposed by Professor Roer-Strier in order to turn these discussions into a positive learning experience while creating a 'safe space' for the group to express themselves, feel heard and process the conversation. The shock-meter was found to be a powerful and effective tool for both personal and group reflection and introspection as well as a means to give legitimacy to people's feelings while transforming what could be a volatile atmosphere into a significant learning opportunity. Like a thermometer, the shock-meter calls attention to the 'internal heat' as it rises in reaction to a discussion or altercation. It is a concept used for self-awareness and understanding of the phenomenon of "the fall of a curtain": shutting down, becoming defensive or going on the attack when feeling threatened by other people's attitudes or opinions or by an argument.



When is it useful?

It is useful to introduce the shock-meter at the beginning of a course or training workshop (in the first or second meeting) and to refer back to it whenever students react to the discussion with a fight, flight or freeze response. The referral to the shock-meter allows a moments pause to gather one's thoughts and identify what has triggered the 'rise in heat' and to enable both a personal and group re-appraisal of values, emotions, attitudes and thoughts. Once practiced, students will refer to the shock-meter themselves and it becomes a useful self-monitoring tool in professional and personal interactions.

How to use the shock-meter:

The shock-meter is a conceptual self-measurement of strong, negative emotional reactions that arise when we encounter something that is against our values, cognitive



schemes, ideals, or normative frame of understanding. We can present the concept when a heated argument begins or we can request that the students think of something they heard or saw, and to which they had a strong reaction, and ask: What did they feel physically? We can later refer to the shock-meter again when something said by one person causes a strong reaction from somebody else. In big classes we may ask the students to keep track of the events that trigger their shock-meter, write them down and later try to decipher the underlying values, ideals or opinions. Discovering what triggers one's personal shock-meter versus other people's shock-meters can provide deep personal and peer insights. It enables the ability to maintain a group discussion on volatile issues as participants practice both self-expression (including self-awareness) and listening to other opinions (other-awareness).

What does the shock-meter make us aware of?

The focus on the personal shock-meter creates self-reflection, delays what might be an unpleasant response and encourages an awareness of clashing ideologies or values that can be examined as separate from our connection as individual people. This encourages active listening (even when we do not agree) and empathy. The process of self-awareness, stimulated by using the shock-meter, leads to elevated self-control (emotional regulation), which in turn leads to more professional, empathic and productive responses to unpredictable and challenging situations.

Challenges & pitfalls when using the shock-meter

Once introduced it is important to refer to this methodology throughout the training in order to make it an effective and handy tool. During heated class discussions it is easy to forget to do this but using the shock-meter is a powerful tool that can re-set volatile situations and turn them into opportunities for learning. The lecturer or facilitator of the group can be an example of this – nobody is exempt from shock-meter overheat!

Third Module: Workshop with Children's Books

Why use children's books?

Typical teaching methods based on lectures, academic texts and intellectual exercises, often do not relate to students' values, experiences, perspectives and emotions; these are rarely directly addressed or meant to be a part of the learning process. In contrast, context awareness training focuses on issues such as personal and group identity, a sense of belonging, the meaning of 'home' and social and political topics especially relating to prejudices, minorities, immigrants and displaced persons. This inevitably involves discussing students' perspectives and emotional reactions. Thus, consideration and reflection upon participants' attitudes and feelings becomes a necessarily part of the learning process, as preparation for the professional encounter in a diverse society. The use of children's books in class can be a useful and effective way to promote self-reflection, productive group discussions and a deep understanding of the complexity of these issues.



Students in a children's book workshop in a course at the Hebrew University





Many children's books are about much more than just simple naive children's stories. Most of these stories deal with universal social themes such as friendship, solidarity, or interpersonal help and support. Not infrequently, they also contain hidden criticism of social conditions, such as traditional role models, and refer to essential questions of human coexistence. Participants are often surprised when asked to read books written for young children, but the resulting conversations are very deep and meaningful, leading to significant insights and profound group discussions. This is because children's books tell stories that are easy to relate to and describe people from different parts of the world, each coping with their own unique surroundings, problems and realities. And yet the themes are universal: the legitimacy of being who we want to be, the dissonance between self-identification and society's perpetual labels, the harmful effects of bias, prejudice and racism, the basic human desire for a safe home and a loving family and how in different contexts each one of us can be the 'other'. Children's books make the strange familiar, refute stereotypes, create empathy, make the presence of the 'other' legitimate, create both self and other awareness and act as cultural bridges which provide a solid foundation for talking about these issues.



DEMO's children's book workshop in Gothenburg



When is it useful?

A workshop with children's books as developed by Dr. Naomi Shmuel is one way of introducing the issues mentioned above into a course or professional training, enabling participants to focus the preliminary discussion on fictional characters and representations. Generally, at some point students will also begin talking about themselves, and how these issues relate to their own personal or professional experiences. Some of the books used may be suitable as a catalyst for engaging parents or children in a similar way, either in educational or therapeutic contexts.

How to use children's books:

Choose illustrated children's books or texts that relate to the topics you wish to discuss. Stories provide a powerful trigger to debate sensitive issues by relating to the characters in the book, making the discussion less personal. Each group of 3-5 students receives a book (or text) with several questions to discuss. They are given 20-30 minutes to read the texts and discuss the questions, after which the students return to the plenary session and each group presents their conclusions. The facilitator encourages a group discussion on the issues raised and adds insights.

Here are some examples:

What is My Name and Who Am I? by Naomi Shmuel²

This book describes how an Ethiopian baby is given many names by all the members of her extended family. The story is about changing names and acquiring more identities through cultural transition.

Questions for the group:

- Are your own names representative of a certain time or place?
- How do you feel about your name? Does it represent you?
- In your opinion, what is the connection between a person's name and their identity or sense of belonging?

Brown Daniel by Naomi Shmuel³

Daniel explains to his classmates why he and his father are brown. He describes his father's childhood in a small Jewish village in Ethiopia and his long and difficult journey to Israel.

Questions for the group:

- How did you feel when you read the story?
- To what extent do you think Daniel's experience is representative of what dark-skinned children experience in pre-school/school?



- How do you think educators and parents can encourage a positive attitude towards diversity?
- What in your own personal experience relates to this book?

The Tree of Life by Naomi Shmuel⁴

An allegorical story where the tree represents the family and uproots. The tree struggles to plant roots and feel at home in the new pasture but is devastated to see its flowers changing beyond recognition. It is hard for the tree to accept the new flowers and come to terms with change.

Questions for the group:

- Are the dilemmas and tensions between parents and children reflected in the story unique to immigrants and displaced persons or are they universal?
- How might you use this book in a counselling meeting with immigrant parents or for educational purposes in a classroom?

What do children's books make us aware of?

The workshop encourages awareness of personal and group concepts, values and priorities regarding the issues involved and their significance in shaping our opinions and working methods as professionals. Through reading children's books, participants become sensitive to the potency of children's stories. Often, they will check their personal libraries for representations of diversity and become aware of the direct or indirect messages and values implicit in the stories, which often use common stereotypes.

Challenges & pitfalls when using children's books

Choosing the right stories to trigger the discussions that the teacher wishes the group to focus on is probably the most important issue here. Therefore, it is important to define the purpose of this workshop and the issues that are of relevance before choosing the books or exerts. It is important to give participants enough time for both reading the texts and having a meaningful discussion. Pre-preparing relevant conceptual frameworks or research related to each story analysis may add important insights for the group and connect the workshop to the readings and bibliographies of the course.

Fourth Module: The Narrative Interview

Why use the narrative interview?

Throughout our lifetime, we collect experiences and memories that in time become our 'life story' – both shaping and representing personal, family and collective identities. Discovering our own and other people's life stories can be a powerful means to foster both self and other awareness, empathy and compassion. For many years, Professor Julia Mirsky has developed the idea of using narrative interviews to develop cultural competence as part of professional training (Mirsky, 2008, 2013)⁵.

Narrative interviews aim to understand the personal perspectives of the interviewees, as embedded in the different contexts in his or her life, through attentive listening to their descriptions and explanations about their life experiences and the meaning ascribed to them. The interviewees' interpretations of reality, their worldview, knowledge and beliefs, are reflected in local symbolism, language and context (Geertz 1973; Spradley 1979).

The narrative interview is especially useful when interviewing immigrants or asylum seekers, since it emphasizes the dimension of time and space and enables people to tell their own story in their own words, including their values, hopes, strengths, skills and coping mechanisms (Usita et al., 2002).

As a training method, conducting a narrative interview with immigrants, displaced persons, migrant workers etc., can allow participants to explore and understand personal, interpersonal, family, community and social issues related to diversity in general and to immigration in particular. It enables an experiential, direct learning experience engaged with reality. For many participants, the invitation to interview someone from one of these groups is a unique and sometimes primary experience of an encounter with an "other" – a person who belongs to a group they usually have a general concept of (many times filled with stereotypes) but no direct acquaintance with. The interview and accompanying assignment allow students to reflect critically on the way in which their image of the "other" is socially constructed, and on the essential role of context and power relations involved in the construction of the "other", the "self" and the relationship between them.

When is it useful?

The narrative interview assignment is useful when there is a wish for deeper self-exploration and several meetings in which to explain, guide and reflect on the process. In addition, students can present parts of their interviews in class, enabling group discussion and reflection. Moreover, it is possible to generate concepts or ideas based on the interviews and their analysis and to then view them in light of relevant theories about immigration, diversity, multiculturalism, acculturation and other concepts.



How to conduct the narrative interview:

The narrative interview is preceded by preparation and discussion in class, detailing the process of choosing an interviewee, the process of self-reflection before and after the interview and the nature of the interview itself. Students conduct narrative interviews with people from a (cultural, social, ethnic, religious, etc.) group unfamiliar to them, creating an encounter with the “other” (Nadan, 2019). This takes the students beyond self-reflection into reflection in-action (Schon, 1983). The interview’s aim is to understand the perspective of the person being interviewed and their life experiences. Therefore, the interviewer has the chance to step outside of his or her narrow cultural backgrounds, to set aside the socially inherited ethnocentrism, if only for a brief period, and to view the world from the vantage point of other human beings who live by different systems of meaning (Spradley, 1979). Students are instructed to prepare only one “grand tour” narrative question and to then listen carefully to the story being told. Questions that worked well for participants were: “could you please tell me the story of your immigration”? or “could you please tell your life story?”

The interviewer needs to stay mostly quiet, which is not an easy task, and use active listening. Once the interviewee ends his or her narrative (which can take 10 minutes or 2 hours), the interviewer can then ask different clarification questions to elaborate on different points or words that were mentioned before (“mini tour questions”) (Spradley, 1979).

At the end of the interview, the student transcribes the interview and can use different methods of analysis (e.g. narrative analysis, content analysis, reflective analysis on the experience).

What does a narrative interview make us aware of?

The process of the interview and its analysis makes students aware of personal pre-conceptions and assumptions about the world and others. Often students become aware of their own stereotypes and cultural bias. Hearing the life stories, challenges and difficulties encountered by others encourages empathy and helps students link between social and political contexts related to these stories. Additionally, the process of the assignment often sheds light on ‘the invisible’ people in our society, as has been commented by various participants who interviewed the migrant laborers caring for their elderly grandparents. These caregivers were described as barely known to them by name before the interview, during which they ‘discovered’ them as people with complicated and moving life stories.

Challenges & pitfalls when using the narrative interview

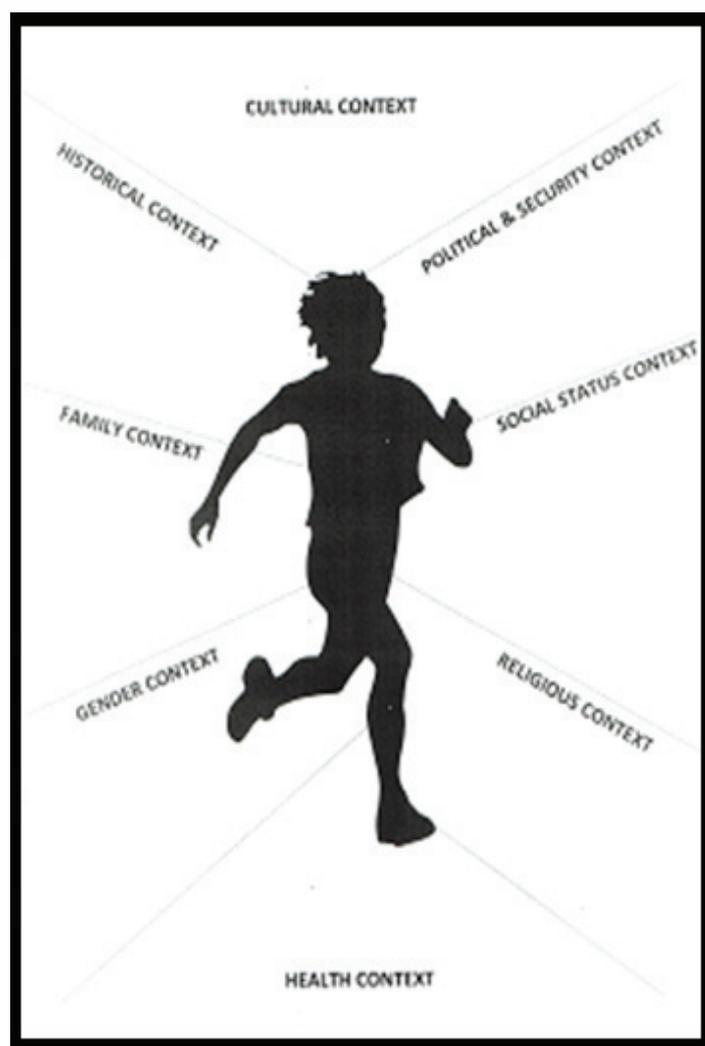
This exercise requires a certain amount of flexibility to make it a viable option for the participants in regards to who is interviewed and how. It requires the participants to

promise confidentiality, provide anonymity and adhere to ethical norms (these include asking the interviewees to sign an informed consent form which the instructor is asked to supervise and share with the students, for details see guidelines on the DEMO web site). Other important issues to consider are power relations between interviewer and interviewee, reciprocity (who gets what out of the situation of the interview), types of questions (open and descriptive questions generally lead to more productive answers), silences and pauses (giving time for thought gathering) and recording and transcribing options. Depending on the participants, considerable preparation and guidance is sometimes required before the actual interviews.

Fifth Module: The Context Game

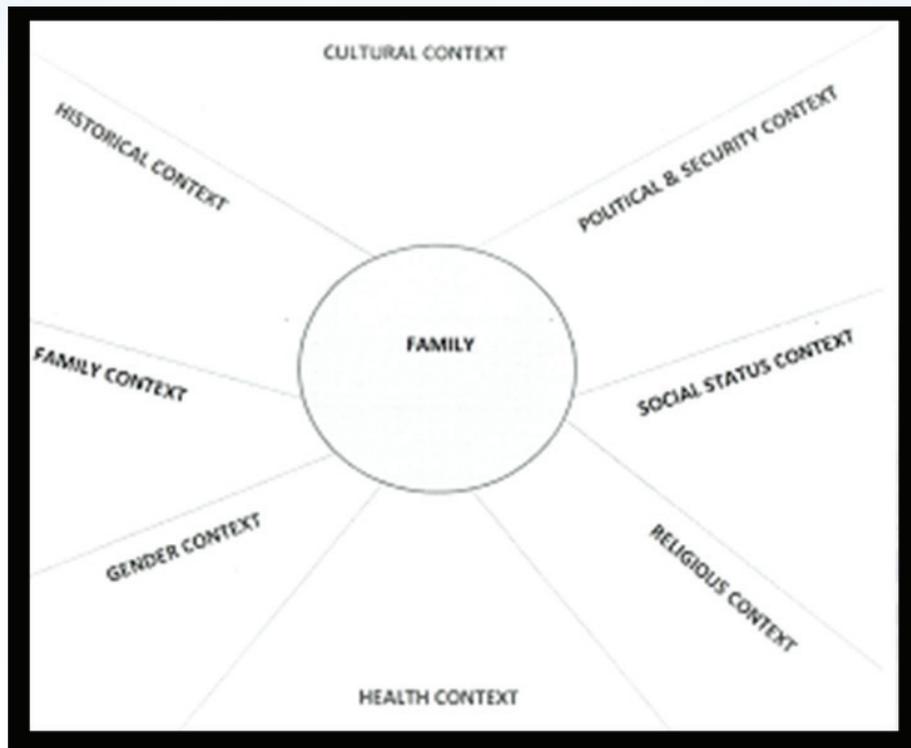
Why use the context game?

The context-informed perspective (Nadan & Roer-Strier, 2020) enables a holistic view, incorporating many contexts affecting people, thus allowing us to see complexities, hybridity, dynamics and power relations as well as intersections of multiple context related causes for life challenges. The Context Game was developed by Dr. Naomi Shmuel with the feedback of NEVET's training group. Using the context game enables the players to 'think outside the box' and reset their perspectives, thus challenging and encouraging an expansion of their existing views and opening new possibilities as new contexts are revealed. The game helps reconsider previous assumptions about oneself (self-reflection) and others by discovering new possible explanations for what may contribute to a presented challenge or problem and gaining insights to new solutions that can be offered⁶.





Professional solutions and methodologies are then better adapted to this newly discovered complex reality. As professionals, we each tend to have ‘blind-spots’ limiting our vision – the game enables us to overcome them.



When is it useful?

The context game is useful for training professionals to understand the context-informed approach by engaging them in an active process involving identifying relevant contexts and re-thinking professional dilemmas and challenges in light of this new perspective. It is advisable to use the context game when the instructor feels the group has adjusted to working together.

How to use the context game:

The context game consists of a map of the different contexts with either an individual or a family in the center, and two sets of cards: 39 context cards and 18 situation cards. The game is suitable for up to 12 participants simultaneously. A large class may be divided into groups.

The two versions of the context-map enable the option of putting the emphasis on the individual or on the family.

The game has five stages:

1. The students gather around the context map and discuss what they see. It is important to explain what is meant by each context. If using the version with the family in the center, include a discussion of definitions of the family, the significance of family in our lives, expectations of families (both personal and social – in raising children, caring for old people, and finding solutions for various life crises).
2. Divide the context cards between the participants. Place the situation cards upside down in a pile on the side.



Context game in an academic class, at Hebrew University



Context game with social workers in Jerusalem



Context game with teachers at Ziv - Sieff and Marks high school, Jerusalem



- The participants must place their cards on the board according to how they perceive the context. Facilitate the participants' deliberation about this topic: many cards could belong in multiple contexts, for example, does language belong in the cultural or family context? Family transition could belong to the historical, family or political contexts. As participants attempt to place their cards in context, the complexity of reality is revealed – there are no right or wrong answers – deliberating is part of the process of perceiving complexity. When everybody has placed their cards on the board, look at it together and discuss the experience: the attempt to define context and understanding how elements interact and overlap.

4. The next stage involves two options:

a. Using the situation cards:

Ask every participant (or a few volunteers if there are many participants) to raise a situation card and read it aloud. The situation cards portray events or challenges, so it is advisable to ask the holder of the card the following questions:

- Tell us about a case you had where this was relevant?
- In your opinion, which contexts on the board might be related to this situation?
- What effect might this have on other contexts?
- Where on the board in front of you, would you begin to look for support?

b. Using real-life cases:

Every participant (or a few volunteers if there are many participants) is asked to think of a person or family in their experience or care (past or present). Ask the holder of the card the following questions (make sure to give them sufficient time to answer):

- In your opinion, which of the contexts in front of you are significant in understanding the life circumstances or situation that the person or the family is in? (Ask the respondent to pick up four relevant cards or simply relate to them verbally).
- In your opinion, where on the board in front of you would you begin to look for support? (Ask the respondent to pick up four relevant cards or simply relate to them verbally).
- Can you identify specific contexts challenging to you as a professional? How do you cope with this?

5. If time and group dynamics allow for it (meaning if the group is intimate and open), it is advisable to conclude the session with an exercise in which the participants share (perhaps in pairs) a personal or family challenge or achievement from their past or present (for example, solving a problem with a child at school) and then look at it through the various contexts in order to expand the picture.

What does the context game make us aware of?

The context game encourages an awareness of complexity, as there is rarely one reason for anything. Discovering the multiple contexts that influence people's lives encourages professionals to find creative solutions to help them solve their problems. The context game provides examples for intersectionality as different contexts intersect and influence each other.

Societies and cultures define the idea of family differently: who can be included, how one joins, if it is possible to disconnect and what expectations exist. For example, family can include only parents and children, or can also include grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives. There are legal definitions of family and there are beliefs and perceptions that people have about families. In some places, families can include same-gender partners, parents who are not married but live together or adopted children (legally or otherwise). The family-centered board enables a discussion of what



professionals consider “normal” and “legitimate” and how they perceive the families they work with. Placing a person in a family context focuses attention on relationships, past and present support networks and the lack or absence of family members for various reasons (disputes, separations, transitions or death). Working with children (in boarding schools, hospitals or schools), the initial focus on family orientates the therapists to see family members as relevant and important in the context of therapy, and encourages creative solutions for maintaining and strengthening family ties even in complex situations where children are separated from family members for various reasons.

Challenges & pitfalls when using the context game

The context game requires a high level of group cooperation and is challenging in a large class. It also requires sufficient time for practice and discussion.

Sixth Module: Simulations

Why use simulations?

It is often difficult for students to translate the knowledge they learn in academia into productive responses in work-related situations and to be fully aware of what exactly triggers their own emotional reactions and complicates their professional responses. A highly effective way to practice this in class is to simulate professional situations and dilemmas, either by using actors or through role-play between the students themselves. Generally, not all students actively participate in the simulations, but those that ‘just observe’ also learn a great deal from the experience, which usually includes heated debates in class following the simulations.

When is it useful?

Practicing simulations in class requires a high degree of trust, and is therefore most effective after the students have been working together for a while and the ground rules for active participation and peer feedback have been established (a ‘safe space’ has been created in the class). Thus, the best time to employ this module is towards the end of the course, as a powerful trigger for self and group reflection in which the aims of the course and the terminology used are refined and emphasized as meaningful in real life situations.

How to use to use simulations

There are four ways to use simulations in a course:

1. Taking the students to a simulation center

Simulation centers generally have staff who moderate the sessions, limited to a maximum of 10-15 students at a time. The participants in the simulations meet the actors in a televised studio while the rest of the group watch the interaction on a screen. Each simulation is generally 5-7 minutes long, there are usually 2 simulations per lesson, each followed by a 30-40 minute discussion.

Participants receive personal feedback from the actors, followed by participation in a group discussion with the class.

The advantages of using a simulation center are:

- The setting and the absence of a live audience make for more realism.
- The assistance of a professional moderator in building the sessions and conducting the post-simulation discussion.
- Professional experienced actors practiced at challenging students and giving constructive feedback.
- The ability to review the recorded simulation with the group and use this recording for teaching other groups.

The disadvantages of using a simulation center are:

- Cost: most simulation centers are quite expensive, generally charging per hour and per simulation.
- The logistics of getting all the students to the simulation center.
- The limitations of group size.

2. Inviting actors to the classroom

It is possible to create appropriate simulations for the class and invite professional actors to participate. The format of the lesson is the same as in the simulation center, differing in that the lecturer oversees the group discussion as opposed to an outside moderator.

The advantages of using professional actors are:

- This is cheaper and less complicated logistically than taking the students to a simulation center.
- Most professional actors have experience challenging students and giving constructive feedback.
- It is a unique and powerful experience for the students.
- This format has the flexibility of changing and re-working the scenarios for the simulations with the actors themselves.

The disadvantages of using professional actors are:

- It still requires extra budget for the course.
- A lot depends on the specific actors involved, whose roles are crucial in the success of the lesson.
- The presence of an audience in the classroom makes the simulation less realistic.
- It is not possible to record & review the simulation professionally.



3. Using pre-prepared filmed simulations

It is possible to use pre-prepared filmed simulations as teaching aids, either from previous sessions in a simulation center or films deliberately pre-prepared for this purpose. The format is different: it does not include a live simulation in class, but rather a discussion following observation of the film.

The advantages of using filmed simulations:

- All students are of equal standing (rather than some acting as participants and some as observers).
- Situations from the field can be brought into the classroom to compare theoretical ideas with real challenges.
- The discussion is less personal because none of the students directly participated themselves.

The disadvantages of using filmed simulations:

- Students may remain passive, and those that are involved in the discussion did not have direct engagement with the situations.
- In addition, there is little if any self-awareness generated by the session.
- This form of learning is still based on hearing\seeing rather than doing.

4. Through role-play between the students in class

If the students already have practical experience in their profession, they can provide their own examples of challenges and dilemmas from the field. Re-enacting them in the safe space of the classroom, with peer feedback, can be a powerful experience.



Simulations of
a class at Meser
Simulation Centre
Jerusalem



Simulations in
Demo's conference at
Trier University



Simulation and class
discussion Hebrew
University-Hadassah
School of Dental
Medicine, Jerusalem





The advantages of using role-play between the students in class:

- All students can participate, with the option of working in small groups.
- Avoids introducing a stranger into the class 'safe-space'.
- The lecturer has complete control as sole moderator.

The disadvantages of using role-play between the students in class:

- There is no external input challenging the students.
- Dependent on student examples from the field.
- Requires creativity and initiative of both students and moderator.
- Less realistic, and therefore less challenging.

What do simulations make us aware of?

Participating in simulations and the group discussions following them is a powerful means to self-reflect regarding perceptions, attitudes, values and practice. It is advised to pre-prepare the issues you wish to work on with your students and to consider the purpose of each simulation chosen. What issues, concepts or practical tools from the course would you like your students to take with them? If this is clear to you, as a moderator, you can steer the discussion to emphasize these. You can pre-prepare terms and concepts from the course for your students to focus on during the discussion.

The simulations themselves trigger emotional reactions that are not normally discussed in class. For example, how do we react when our professional authority is questioned? When our clients behave in unexpected ways? When the person opposite me has such a different perspective on the issue that my common sense is not logical to them? In professional situations, how does the presence of unspoken identities affect the interaction?

Students who participate in simulations often identify the experience as having been the most significant of their degree training.

Challenges & pitfalls when using simulations

Simulations create unpredictable situations and require thorough preparation beforehand and fast thinking during the lesson. Participators may find the experience difficult; it is important to prepare them for what will take place, be encouraging afterwards and limit the feedback of the group to positive affirmations and suggestions for alternative actions, avoiding direct or personal criticism. To help the students focus on concepts and issues previously discussed, it can be helpful to pre-prepare cards with the concepts used in the course for students to relate to during the discussion.

Chapter 5: Concluding remarks for lecturers and trainers

The innovative training methods presented in this booklet, aimed at preparing professionals to cope effectively with diversity through a deep understanding of “self” and “other” based on an awareness of context and complexity, can be challenging for both teachers/trainers and participants. This type of training requires something different from both. As a final note, here are some practical tips for lecturers or trainers:

1. Role-modeling:

The way the teacher relates to in-class diversity is a model for professional behavior in the field. This includes attentive listening, respectful responses, allowing for the legitimacy of different opinions and acceptance of different responses to required participation (from silence to frequent remarks). Role-modeling refers to the ability of the teacher to reflect the concepts of the course in the very management of the discussion: the presence of context and complexity, adding alternative perspectives, avoiding over-simplification and generalizations and challenging participants to a wider, more comprehensive and dynamic view of reality.

2. Sharing:

The modules discussed require participants to share from their personal and professional experiences for the benefit of group learning. This requires the teacher to share, too, revealing a certain amount of vulnerability and humility, exposing the expert who is still learning from every situation, who might also make mistakes. This display of common humanity can be an inspiration to the participants who (perhaps) expect themselves to be perfect and/or are afraid of embarrassing themselves.

3. Patience:

Many participants will come unprepared for what takes place in this course (expecting a frontal lecture or passive learning), which may initially cause them to be critical or uncooperative. Introspection and unpacking existing stereotypes and biases can be a painful process, one which not all participants are happy to undertake. Exposing the existence of privilege and disadvantage in the class can lead to heated debates. Remembering to hold up the shock-meter as a means to calm things down, to use such situations to promote self-awareness, active listening and empathy, requires intense active listening to the class as well as a great deal of patience, calm, innovation and leadership on behalf of the teacher. Deciding the right moment at which to stop a



heated discussion and use it for personal and group reflection can be challenging.

4. Sensitivity:

As participants undertake the various tasks in the modules and open themselves up to self-reflection and group and class discussions, the teacher must be sensitive to the process unfolding among the class. How is this influencing the participants? Are some of the insights painful for some people? Is the interaction between the different identities present in the class sufficiently respectful? Does everybody have an equal right to be heard or are there people who are wary of voicing their opinions? What has occurred in class between the minority and the majority groups and will this have repercussions? As in every classroom, there are overt and covert processes happening simultaneously, an awareness of these requires great sensitivity not only to what people are saying but to what they are not saying; to their facial expressions and body language.

5. Flexibility:

Each training session, each group of people, is different. There is a certain element of unpredictability in each new course and no matter our level of experience or preparation, we may be surprised. Sometimes an exercise, such as the identity puzzle, can take much more time than we originally allocated for it because something came up in the discussion that needs to be further examined or explored (on a theoretical or an emotional level). For example, if someone shares a deeply moving personal story, or if there is a volatile clash of opinions, these are situations that necessitate class-time to connect to and discuss, to foster empathy and insight.

6. Engagement:

Innovative training sessions can be intense, involving a much higher level of teacher-student engagement with the participants than regular frontal lectures. This can be harnessed for the learning process, but can be demanding for the teacher, as students may have personal questions they wish to discuss outside of class hours or via email or phone messages. Encouraging students to raise their issues in class discussions, and keeping the boundaries of a professional relationship while relating to participants needs can be challenging.

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1. The identity puzzle was developed by Professor Dorit Roer-Strier and the social location exercise was developed by Dr. Yochay Nadan
 2. Published by the Hippy Program (Etgar), The Institute for Advancement of Education, Hebrew University Jerusalem (1999).
 3. This was the first children's book in Hebrew to feature a brown-skinned child: 'Aba Hum' - Published by Modan (1991).
 4. Very useful in parent groups with immigrants, published by the Hippy Program (Etgar), The Institute for Advancement of Education, Hebrew University Jerusalem (1999).
 5. Also referred to as the ethnographic interview, developed as a teaching tool by Dr. Yochay Nadan, see: Nadan, Y. (2019). Teaching Note—The ethnographic interview as a method in multicultural social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 55(2), 396-402.
 6. The Context Game kit is available in English and Hebrew, for details please contact the author

