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Pilot Web Course to raise awareness on Aversive discrimination

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ADAT analyses how aversive discrimination (in particular aversive disability, sexism and heterosexism) can influence the learning paths of learners and, in general, the organization and provision of adult education.

A pilot web course to promote the awareness of aversive discrimination and strategies to cope successfully with it has been planned, organized, tested and evaluated with professionals giving consultancy in adult training, in Italy.

Later on, the same pilot course will be organised with teachers working in adult education, in Austria.

It is important to remind that the course is an "awareness raising course", in other words the aim is to give the participants information increasing their knowledge or perception of a number of situations related to aversive discrimination

No "teachers" have been involved in the course, but "mentors". There are many perspectives on the definition of mentoring, what we apply in ADAT is: "The mentor is someone who had "been there, done that" before." The mentors in ADAT are people who have been dealing with aversive disability, heterosexism and sexism for a longer time than the average participant to the course". Another important role has been that of "role model", persons who may serve as an example, whose behaviour is - or can be - emulated by others.

The webcourse has been organised on an online environment (Moodle platform). The web course has been kept as simple as possible in its structure so as to allow the participation of people who do not have high ICT skills, who do not intend to dedicate too much time in learning complex online tasks and who prefer to focus on interaction with other participants and mentors.

Five modules have been organized, each with a specific learning task: aversive discrimination, aversive disability, aversive heterosexism, aversive sexism and intersectionality. The aim of each module was to deepen the knowledge of the participants on the topic and to examine the topic from the other angles through the joint discussion with the other participants and the mentors and role models.

We are currently working at the Webcourse manual that will contain: contents, structure, organisation, alternative to contents materials and any other information useful to organise the course in the future.



Modern forms of heterosexuality

ArciLesbica Associazione Nazionale

The third module of the ADAT on-line course focuses on modern forms of heterosexuality and was led by ArciLesbica Associazione Nazionale.

The purpose of the module was to provide participants with aspects on which they could reflect, helping them identify the main mechanisms that characterise the modern forms in which lesbian and gay discrimination appears: from the negation of the existence of discrimination to the interpretation of requests for rights as requests for privileges to the detriment of singles and heterosexual couples, the use of positive stereotypes to identify lesbians and gays or to paternalistic methods to discourage visibility or the request for rights and/or positive actions, etc....

Input for starting a discussion in the forum was a quote related to gay pride that is provided in its complete form below: *"I have gay friends and I have never displayed any type of repulsion or discrimination towards homosexuals, whereas I have displayed and continue to display a form of disappointment towards Gay Pride, a display that I find bothersome because you can see truly shocking scenes, scenes that are also detrimental for gays. I think that homosexuals with good sense can realise this better than me. Furthermore, it seems we are being presented with a form of privilege, which is quite different from discrimination, considering that, for example, no local administration had ever given me money to go and demonstrate my sexual preferences".*

It was initially difficult for the participants to formulate comments regarding the specific topic of modern heterosexuality. They tended to enter comments that refer to traditional discriminatory methods or personal facts and experiences related to experiences of lesbian and gay friends and family members and the difficulties they had in terms of acceptance in their families of origin.

We therefore thought that for some participants, starting from a direct and personal experience related to the topic of homosexuality in general could be the best channel through which the concept of modern heterosexuality could be explored. Here are some examples:

I always thought that the biggest problem would be to come out to your family and as a parent to accept the homosexuality of a son or daughter, and as far as I am concerned I know that this would be difficult to digest.

As a mother, I am sure that the difficult aspect for the parents is to face situations that could place their children in a position of difficulty, socially, or even of danger. We parents tend to protect, but how can you protect a son or daughter who makes a choice that is "foreign" to us because we do not really know what it is all about and in which we do not participate?

Based on these considerations, we tried, on the one hand, to deepen knowledge about the general topic of homosexuality in family relationships according to the specific needs shown by each participant, and at the same time we tried to start from the argument that was introduced to offer areas of reflection relative to the specific module topic. During the on-line discussion, other participants concentrated instead on the identification of concrete examples of heterosexuality in modern terms in relation to their personal experience or their work context. One case provided a particularly appropriate example that quoted an interview that was shown in a video dedicated to homophobia, which the participants had seen a few months earlier:

"Italy is becoming a country with various festivals, family day, the local festival, May Day, everything is a festival, also gay pride, whatever it is called...and then... Today Napoletano said to not blame gays . I have never blamed them, but...from not blaming them to celebrating them.... It is not a free liberty, it is a liberty that is disturbing, because if you think about all those things when they take place, the mess that is created in the city (...) Once no one said anything, but now I think there has been an excessive liberalisation of these things..."

In other cases, reflections regarding modern forms of heterosexuality were broader and published items of a more general nature were suggested that addressed current political and cultural situations in Italy.

Speaking of excesses, in this historical period, in this country, makes me smile a bit. What can we say about the television, just to make an example, that offers "spectacles" and excesses of every type, therefore it seems that no one seems to be scandalised anymore. Talking about good taste seems to be a characteristic of the past. Therefore who knows why only in these cases a certain restraint is demanded in expressions, in name of a moderation that I can no longer find anywhere.

Considerations on the experience as Role Model in the ADAT course

Giovanna Nastasi

My experience on this project began as a linguistics requirement. There was the need to have someone who could speak in English with foreign partners.

Soon afterwards I began to read some of the articles which in part have been used as tutorial documentation for the course, and I started to tackle the concept of *disablism*, previously ignored by me (at least from a theoretical perspective or "consciously"?).

After a few weeks my involvement in this project was no longer for professional reasons, but slowly I began to feel invoked. As I read through the experiences of Mackay, *Deal et altri* I felt "pulled in" by force and I found out about many things which up to then were only known to me at an unconsciousness level.

These considerations and the enormous interest towards the point of view that the course wished to emphasize have made me become a Role Model inside the discussion forum on Disablism.

It is needless to say that reading, discussing and reflecting on these themes has seen me directly involved, therefore my judgement is based on the underlying personal experience that has seen many of these phases described by the different authors during the course of my personal life.

I have directly seen the experience of dissimulation, rather than that of the "secret" right up to outing and revelation and thus acceptance of disablism, and at times moving on to the "masquerade". It is the world that surrounds us which sometimes requires this and therefore we are content to take on the role that is requested.

Moreover I share some of the ideas with Alessandra (tutor of the module in question) that disablism, at times (unfortunately more often than not), is above all "a de-personalised health problem that requires diagnosis and treatment: the person is thus defined on the basis of his or her disablism and the sociological and psychological aspects of the issue are scotomized".



Above all for the medical profession I am and have been a "case" and when I move from that which they expect from a person with my problems I then become a "special case" and thus go beyond their duties.

When I spoke with doctors I expressed my thoughts that for me it was worse to have memory problems rather than worry about advancing solemnly with uncertainty. I was seen as an extraterrestrial since the majority of people, according to medical experience, are afraid not to walk.

But I am **not** my legs. I **am** my **Brain!** What I want is to be rehabilitated so that I can stay alert and attentive for as long as possible.

As a person affected by Multiple Sclerosis I took several years before deciding to tell the world rather than to continue pretending to be a normal person. At the end of the day I consider myself to be normal. I only need to do things a little more slowly and to adopt all those measures which can help me in life (this is why the social dimension of disablism is so important).

I can state here that this course has been an excellent trampoline and I finally feel happy with MYSELF. I was always unsure whether to come out into the open or not. Many years ago when I made my debut, some said that I would be better off keeping this issue to myself and this I did. But a series of difficulties obliged me to come out into the open, otherwise my need to always take the elevator, even for one floor, would have been difficult to decipher.

When I began to interact with the forum I had certain expectations.

Obviously I expected that which I would have done if I had to encounter someone in a position to discuss his or her experience with the objective of understanding the perspective of those living with the problem.

To see and try to perceive the reality with the eyes of someone who has lived through this, makes one think in another way and raises several questions. This is always positive. It arouses, moves something.

I saw myself as a resource for the discussion group who could "take advantage" of the situation to ask all sorts of questions useful to "understand". I really needed to make people understand exactly what could go on in the head of a person needing to stand up in the world in which he or she lives and, hopefully, to work with certain difficulties.

However all the participants, in some way, and most certainly due to an excess of delicacy and not due to discrimination, treated me with a certain detachment, or at least this is what I perceived.

I would have asked a multitude of things and would have assisted in the discussion. However I felt myself approached by a suggestion which I interpret as a simple effort with the scope of making the other interlocutor following this to understand and which in reality does not really intervene with him. I found everyone really professional in their work and roles. However I would have liked to delve into the aspects associated with deeper personal sensations.

I am convinced that all those involved were touched and everyone deep inside had further feelings and sensations, but I really would have preferred to discuss these together.

At the end of the day I felt rather "invisible" probably due to an excess of protection.

Nonetheless I would like to reassure all those who work with me that I do not need any protection and at times indifference is worse than curiosity.

There is no malice or controversy in my words, but simply an observation of the fact that in front of disablism, irrespective of what this is, people freeze, probably due to the simple reason that one does not know really know what to do to not seem invasive or to be curious or morbid.

I really wanted to follow this course which for me was enlightening and liberating for having done an introspection and relived moments of my past life.

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