



Didactic materials for training for universities' administrative staff preparing for servicing foreign students

The didactic materials were designed as a training medium to prepare employees for servicing foreign students. Its purpose is dual: a. to educate the staff who have frequent contact with foreigners and b. facilitate the communication between the two by preparing the former.

These didactic materials consist of activities, a theoretical background as well as day programs to help with training. The majority of these activities are hands-on experiences. Information of the activities is given such as short descriptions, time frames, materials required, objectives, how-to instructions and questions to reflect on.

To fully benefit from these didactic materials, active participation is encouraged. The two-day program included here can be modified accordingly to suit your educational/training needs. Also, at the end of the two-day program, a pool of activities can be found. To ensure better comprehension of theory, the use of this document in conjunction with the PowerPoint presentation is recommended.

Two-days Program

1st Day

Introduction I. – Playing a game: Intercultural encounters (preparation: 10 minutes, game: 20 minutes, discussion: 20 minutes)

Participants come into the room and they choose a card from the table. The name of a country is written on each card along with some characteristics of people from that country. For example,

Germany: strict, punctual, friendly, disciplined, well organised.

Spain: funny, hospitable, kind, active, loud

France: frank, private, respectful, traditional

Saudi Arabia: strict, lawful, religious, generous

Each participant pins a sign on their chest.

This game draws attention to the diversity of people. Already at the time of introduction, conflicts can arise in the first minutes, as one person communicates by grasping the other's arm while there are people who cannot bear the touch. For instance, in Saudi Arabia it is forbidden to look into the other's eyes (especially when is of the other gender). Also, interaction between men and women is limited there. There are a number of small differences that can cause conflict. Some are funny, but there are some that can cause a more serious problem.

Introduction II. – The participants and the trainer introduce themselves (20 minutes)

The participants can express their expectations for the training. The trainer outlines the course of the two-day program and explains the rules.

Theory – Definition and Models of Culture (30 minutes)

Models – Hofstede onion model, Hall's iceberg model

Elements of the culture – history, religion, values, social organisations, language

Cultural differences – list of examples of everyday differences

Discussion – personal experiences linked to the theory (30 minutes)

The trainer should give an example of his personal experience to encourage participation and then ask the following sample questions:

1. Have you ever been judged by another based on your outer layer? Was their opinion wrong? How did you feel?
2. Have you ever judged someone based on external factors and first impressions? What were these factors? (clothing, accent, appearance?)
3. After interacting with the person you judged, did your opinion change based on their inner layers? What were the inner elements you discovered?

4. In your opinion, how important is the acknowledgment and discovery of all layers for comprehending someone from another culture?

Lunch break

Activity: Do not judge a book by its cover – 20 minutes

Materials required: pen and paper

How-to instructions: On a piece of paper, give a brief description of a colleague (skin colour, clothing, gender, age, characteristics, etc.). Based on this description try to guess some information about them. Have someone else do the same for you. Once finished, exchange information and discuss whether the assumptions made are true.

Objective: to comprehend that people more often than not wrongly judge others based on the outer layers (on what they see), to learn to avoid labelling and stereotyping others on their appearance and acknowledge inner characteristics as crucial elements worthy to be taken into account for achieving a diversity-friendly and multicultural environment. Remember: not everyone is the same.

Discussion of the activity – 20 minutes

The trainer should ask the participants to following questions:

- were your assumptions about the other person correct?
- Were the assumptions of your colleague about you correct? What was wrong?
- How did you feel being judged only by the way you look?
- Now that you have exchanged information, has the way you view your colleague changed?

Important aspects to be emphasised by trainer:

- Wrong judgement of other based on outer layers
- Multifaceted culture
- Equal importance of inner and outer layers of culture
- Active participation is needed for the formation of one's opinion of another and for better comprehension of other cultures

Theory – dimensions of culture (30 minutes)

Hofstede model of cultural dimensions

Hall model of cultural dimensions

The trainer explains these two models with slides and examples on PowerPoint Presentation.

Roleplay – 20 minutes

This roleplay hints at Hofstede's power distance index cultural dimension. It shows that individuals from high context cultures such as the student below prefer to be given specific guidelines and to be directed from older people toward the actualisation of a task.

Place: International Office – Academic affairs

Roles: international student, officer, other students waiting

The international student is very angry. He wanted to arrange accommodation at the university student halls but he did not successfully complete the application form, he submitted it late and as a result he was not given a room. He cries, gets agitated and tries to prove that it was not his fault to fill the paperwork incorrectly and miss the deadline as nobody showed him how to do it. And he brings up all his previous incidents. The administrator, on the other hand, tries to be patient but she too loses control after some time.

Important: The participants do not choose their role. It is the responsibility of the trainer to disseminate the roles.

Discussion – 30 minutes

Conclusions. It is important to discuss all roles and changes of the situation according to each participant's opinions. The group has to find the best solution on how to calm the student and identify the reasons for frustration.

Issues for discussion based on the above roleplay scenario:

- Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions
- Discussion of student role:
 - Emphasis to be given on dimension of power distance index
 - Identification of reasons for frustration: young people from high context cultures better operate with the use of guidance in order to successfully complete a goal.
- Discussion of admin role:
 - Importance of being aware of Hofstede's and Hall's models of cultural dimensions
 - Understanding the impact of power distance index dimension in relation to this student
 - Significance of being aware of multiculturalism and being open-minded
 - Provide alternative accommodation

Theory – Culture shock (30 minutes)

The trainer explains the concept of culture shock with the use of slides to facilitate the comprehension of the 5 stages of culture shock

Definition of culture shock: uncomfortable feeling/feeling of disorientation one might experience when finding him/herself in an unfamiliar culture or way of life.

- Honeymoon: people are excited, positive and curious to visit or see a new place, gain new experiences

- hostility and irritability: people start realising the differences between the new culture and their own. Feeling of frustration are generated due to difficulty to adapt.
- gradual adjustment: people begin to feel more relaxed and start to understand how things are done in the host country and culture. They begin to adapt.
- Adaptation: people have now adapted to the new country and they feel at ease with the way things are done.
- Re-entry travel shock: people are once again shocked upon their return to their own country as things are not what they were expected to be.

Discussion – personal examples and questions (30 minutes)

The trainer is the moderator. A summary of the day’s experiences is essential. The issues to be discussed are the following:

- A recap of the models of cultural dimensions (Hofstede & Hall) as well as culture shock for ensuring clarity and understanding of these concepts.
- The importance of these concepts and their role in acquiring a multicultural awareness and understanding, especially in situations dealing with international students.
- To ensure clarity of understanding of the concepts and their application in every day situations, ask the participants to provide their own examples based on the cultural dimensions discussed earlier in the day.
- Allow some time to answer questions the participants may pose.

2nd Day

Informal conversation about the former day experiences

Activity: Stereotypes – 20 minutes

Materials required: Pen and paper

How-to instructions: write down the following stereotypes (they can be adjusted to each country and to suit the exercise needs) and discuss with your colleagues whether these are true or not and give counter examples. For example,

- All (add nationality here, e.g. Irish) are lucky
- are so strict and serious
- are loud
- are always late
- are obsessed with time
- are lazy
- are overly patriotic

Other example of stereotyping statements could be the following:

- Women are bad drivers
- All teenagers are addicted to technology
- All women gossip
- All politicians are corrupted

- e. Unlike women, men are good in math

Objective: to raise awareness, embrace and accept diversity and promote respect for the other. Additionally, to avoid labelling, making assumptions and jumping into conclusions based on stereotypical ideas and opinions.

Discussion of the activity – 20 minutes

Here the trainer should ask the participants the following questions:

- has your opinion on someone been shaped by such stereotypes in the past? If so, how and to what extent? Share your experiences with the process of stereotyping.
- can you give your own definition of stereotyping?
- do the above statements apply to all ... (nationality, e.g. Germans)?
- In your opinion, why do people stereotype others?
- in what way has this exercise facilitated you in becoming more aware about stereotyping?

Also, important aspects for the trainer to highlight are the following:

- the concept of stereotypes
- how people inadvertently and effortlessly make assumptions about others
- the negative effect stereotyping has on people (i.e. people are automatically excluded from social groups based on wrong judgment and quick assumptions)

The above leads towards the theory provided in the following section.

Theory – Stereotypes - 30 minutes

Definitions, function/importance of stereotypes

This section is dedicated to the definitions, types, advantages and disadvantages as well as approaches related to stereotypes.

Definition of stereotypes and cultural generalisations:

The term ‘cultural generalisation’ refers to a statement about a group of people. For example, Greeks and Spanish are less punctual than people from Germany. A cultural generalisation can turn into a stereotype if used to describe individual members of a group. For instance, it is a stereotype to effortlessly assume that just because someone is Greek is also not punctual in meetings. Based on this, a cultural ‘stereotype’ is the application of a generalisation to every member of a group.

Importance and function of cultural generalisation and stereotypes:

Overall, one should be aware of the fact that we cannot avoid making generalisations because they are part of our (human) perception. Every object of has been assigned in a certain category which automatically associates it with other similar objects and contrasts it with different objects. An object of perception cannot exist without some set of associations. For example, a letter is an object of our human perception which is associated to the category of forms of communication, just as an email is. However, it also belongs to the category of old-fashioned form of communication in contrast to the email which belongs to a technology-enhanced forms of communication.

Culture can be seen as a categorisation of people. It is common for people to belong to groups and share similar characteristics. However, members of the culture may vary as to *how much* they share the groups' common elements. Stereotypes arise when one denies that variation and assume that these traits apply to *all* members of a community.

Discussion – 20 minutes

The trainer is the moderator. Here the trainer should:

- briefly repeat the definitions of stereotypes and cultural generalisations and highlight the difference between the two.
- ask the participants to give examples of cultural generalisations and stereotypes in order to ensure proper comprehension of the differences between the two terms.
- allow some time to answer questions the participants may pose

Short introduction to the following section:

The trainer should prepare the group for the next section. Prior to the lunch break, and once the trainer has ensured that comprehension of the above discussed terms is established, he/she should move on to introduce very briefly the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity by Bennet (1986, 1993) by giving the following information:

The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity is a framework which helps us understand the reaction of people to cultural difference. By understanding its stages one can learn how to acknowledge the existence of cultural differences, avoid making quick and wrong assumption of others (stereotyping), and also increase his/her competence in intercultural relations.

This model and its various stages will be discussed in further detail after the lunch break.

Lunch break

Theory – intercultural communication - 30 minutes

As mentioned previously, the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity is a tool for helping people recognise the existence of cultural differences. It can increase someone's cultural sensitivity and competence in relationships with people from other cultures.

This framework consists of six stages. The first three stages are ethnocentric (i.e. central to reality). These are the following:

- a. Denial: only a person's own culture is experienced as a *true* culture. People are not interested in cultural difference and act in a negative way if another culture has an effect on them.
- b. Defence: only one's culture is experience as the only *good* culture. Categorisation exist between 'us'/'superior' (known) and 'them'/'inferior' (unknown). People feel threatened and judge other cultures.

- c. **Minimization:** aspects of one's cultural view as seen as universal. People at this stage expect similarities between cultures and may also correct the behaviour of others in order to match their cultural expectations.

The next three stages are ethnorelative (i.e. one's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures)

- d. **Acceptance:** one's own culture is perceived as equally complex to other cultures. To accept cultural difference does not necessarily mean to agree with it. People at this stage are curious about and respect other cultures.
- e. **Adaptation:** one's perception of the world is expanded to include elements from other cultures. People here have the ability to see the world 'through different eyes' and can purposefully adjust their behaviour to communicate with others from other cultures.
- f. **Integration:** one indicates the ability to move in and out of cultural worldviews. Because of this, at times people may experience issues related to their cultural limits ('cultural marginality').

Discussion – 30 minutes

The trainer is the moderator. Here, the trainer should:

- ask the participants to provide personal examples of experience of cultural difference. The moderator should attempt to discuss these experiences in relation to the stages of the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. To do so, he/she can ask the following questions:
 - Did you ever find yourself in an other culture?
 - Was it different from yours? If so, how?
 - How did you feel about this culture?
 - Was it easy for you to accept elements of the new culture? And if yes, what were they?
 - Did you manage to adapt to the new culture? Did you have an effective communication with others from this culture? What did you have to change in order to achieve this?
- Briefly repeat the purpose of this model (i.e. progress of people toward enhancement of deeper understanding of cross-cultural differences) and the stages of the model to ensure proper comprehension of the terms.

Activity: I do not mean to be rude but... (**Multiculturalism**) – 20 minutes

This exercise relates to the 'experience of difference' of Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. As explained above, this model helps people become aware of differences between cultures and raises one's cultural sensitivity.

Material required: pen and paper

How-to instructions: on a piece of paper write down a few statements on rude or inappropriate behaviour. For example, asking about someone's personal health or one's decision not to have children, burping or passing gas at the end of a meal, arriving late for a meeting without apologising, avoiding eye contact when in conversation with someone/looking directly at someone when speaking, asking about one's financial

situation, using first name when conversing with someone you do not know. Discuss these statements with your colleagues.

Objective: to avoid making assumption of similarities between cultural contexts and instead understand and embrace a multicultural environment, to familiarize with behaviors which may be unusual or rude to you as acceptable by other people from different backgrounds and cultures. It is important to remember that the rules of politeness are neither fixed nor certain in all cultural contexts. They can also be different by people from the same culture (individual differences → the same culture, but different levels of socialization of social norms and principles).

Discussion – 30 minutes

A short discussion based on the activity below should take place. The trainer acts as moderator and asks the participants following questions:

- which statements describe inappropriate behavior?
- Which statements can be considered acceptable? Why?
- Which of these statements could cause misunderstanding?
- Could these behaviours influence the way we see and form an opinion about someone?
- Could the meaning of these statements change from inappropriate to appropriate based on the cultural context? And if so, how?
- What have you learned from this activity? How have you benefited?

Theory – the **conflict** and the **conflict resolution techniques** – 30 minutes

Initially, the participants attempt to define the term ‘conflicts’. Definitions are then given by the trainer. The iceberg of the conflicts. Discussion of the methods of conflict management (relationship or the result is most important):

- Problem solving/Collaboration/Confronting
- Compromising/Reconciling
- Withdrawing/Avoiding
- Forcing/Competing
- Smoothing/Accommodating

Discussion – 20 minutes

The trainer is the moderator. A summary of the day’s experiences is essential. The issues to be discussed are the following:

- A recap of the theory on stereotypes, intercultural communication (the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) is given for ensuring clarity and understanding of these concepts.
- The importance of these concepts and their role is highlighted in acquiring a multicultural awareness and understanding, especially in situations dealing with international students.

- To ensure clarity of understanding of the concepts and their application in every day situations, ask the participants to provide their own examples based on theory of stereotypes and intercultural communications discussed earlier in the day.
- Allow some time to answer questions the participants may pose.

Activities Pool

This section serves as an activities pool. As such, it presents a group of activities relevant to the theory mentioned above. These activities constitute the didactic materials and syllabus and are readily available to educators and trainers for training for universities' administrative staff. They are constructed in such a way to benefit those who prepare for servicing foreign students.

The educators can choose all or some of these activities and adjust them accordingly in order to put together day-programs for their training (similar to the one offered above). Information is given on the time and materials required, how-to instructions and objective. The (self-)reflection questions provided function as a trigger to get participants think further and reach a deeper understanding about a specific cultural issue or spark a conversation and engage with others. Please remember, these are hands-on activities and to fully benefit participation is encouraged.

1. Can you read the signs? (Body Language Activity)

This activity can be used as an ice breaker activity at the beginning of the program. It can be used to emphasise intercultural differences one may encounter during their communication with others from different cultures. Or it can be used instead Activity no. 2 'Do not judge a book by its cover'. It can be linked to the theory of cultural differences.

Time required: 20 mins

Materials required: none

How-to instructions: form groups of 4-5 and each member of the group after the other will try to communicate one message to the group members using only body language. Then compare the meanings of the gestures and the perception of each group member in order to find convergence or misunderstandings.

Objective: to understand that body language signs may differ between cultures and can lead to misunderstandings, to be open to other cultures, to not rush into conclusions about someone based on their body language and to show acceptance of other cultures.

Questions to be asked after the completion of activity:

- did you interpret your colleagues body language signs correctly?
- Was there a misunderstanding?
- Was your body language message conveyed to your colleagues properly?
- What does that tell you about culture and body language?

2. Are we on the same page? (Cross-Cultural Communication Activity)

This activity relates to Hall's cultural dimensions. More specifically it can be used to support the concepts of interpersonal relationships and the monochronic vs. polychronic time. Also, it can be used to emphasize the differences between high and low-context cultures.

Time required: 20 mins

Materials required: pen and paper

How-to instructions: on a piece of paper, write down terms such as 'deadline', 'rules', 'time', 'student loan' and give a brief definition of them. Have your colleagues do the same. Compare your definition.

Objective: to understand that words sometimes may convey different meanings for each person, to recognise the necessity to be clear, precise and specific when use language and to ensure that the other person shares the same view and fully comprehends the words used.

Questions to be asked after the completion of activity:

- Have you explained the terms accurately and in a comprehensive way?
- Have you been fully understood?
- Have you comprehended what the other speaker is saying?
- Do your definitions match?
- Do you share the same understanding of the terms? If not, what else could be done?

3. In their shoes... (Disability Raising Awareness Activity)

This activity relates to the theory of stereotypes and generalizations and can replace the activity 'Stereotypes' in the two-day program. It can be used to comprehend how to avoid labelling, making assumptions and jumping into conclusions based on stereotypical ideas and opinions about disabled people.

Time required: 30 - 40 mins

Material required: blindfold, wheelchair

How-to instructions: Use a blindfold to close your eyes and, with some help from a colleague, attempt to visit a public meeting place on university grounds (e.g. library/café) or someone's office. Alternatively, a wheelchair could be used. Return and discuss your experience.

Objective: to find oneself out of their comfort zone by stepping into the shoes of a person with disability, to attempt to complete a task and recognize the existence of difficulty in everyday practices, to find oneself in the place of a disabled as a receiver of certain looks and behaviours from other people. This activity

can be used to raise awareness about disabled people, embrace and accept diversity and promote respect for the other.

Questions to be asked after the completion of activity:

- Was it easy to complete your task?
- What difficulties did you encounter?
- How did you feel as receiver of certain looks and behaviours from others?
- Have you so far, in your communication with people with disabilities, taken into account the challenges they may face and/or their disability?
- What would you change to facilitate a disabled person?
- What would you change overall in your perception of a disabled person?

4. Excuse me but my name is...! (Personal Identity Acknowledgement Activity)

This exercise could replace the activity 'I do not mean to be rude but...' which relates to the theory of intercultural communication and multiculturalism. More specifically, it emphasizes the 'cultural difference' of Bennett's model of Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. It also facilitates people to become aware of differences between cultures and understand the various and different cultural aspects which may constitute one's identity.

Time required: 10 – 15 mins

Materials required: none

How-to instructions: share and discuss with your colleague the origins of your given name and family name. By taking into account your culture and background, discuss what your name means, what it identifies or indicates (e.g. ethnic group) and/or the significance it carries (importance in family, personal characteristic, name of a loved one/someone who has passed away etc.). Then listen to your colleague do the same.

Objective: to acknowledge the importance of names as essential part of one's identity, to familiarise yourself with the different cultural ways of naming people, to understand the importance of pronouncing a person's name correctly and to comprehend that the proper use of someone's name facilitates communication, paves a more personal approach and also shows respect.

Questions to be asked after the completion of activity:

- Have you ever had your name mispronounced?
- Have you ever been called a name you didn't like? How did you feel?
- Did you feel that your culture has been acknowledged? If not, did you explain how your culture is an important aspect of your name and identity? After doing so, has the person pronounced your name correctly?