

Different countries - different customs (intercultural training for Socrates students)

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"Your Czech Socrates students are diligently and proficiently studying in our department. They have obtained several certifications, in fact more than they need. Their command of the language is good, but in terms of their behaviour, they are somewhat reserved, they rarely socialise with other international students and often form closed groups..."

Our instructors hear such and similar opinions at foreign universities. The experiences of our students, who have participated in Socrates study abroad, also show that they were not well prepared, particularly in regard to intercultural communication proficiency. The conditions for international communication have fundamentally changed in recent years as a result of social changes in today's Europe, to which training institutions in particular must respond. Successful communication not only requires a good command of the language and purely declarative knowledge, but also other competencies, including sociocultural and intercultural competency. Therefore, a new syllabus has been created for the learner-centred intercultural training of Socrates students.

Syllabus:

1. What is culture? Various perspectives on the concept

Concepts: Culture in the broader and narrower sense, cultural differences

2. How does communication take place? What characteristics do intercultural communication situations exhibit? Linguistic and psychological principles of intercultural communication.

Concepts: Communication, non-verbal communication (body language), intercultural communication

3. How am I? How are the others?

Concepts: Prejudices, stereotypes, cultural standards, "critical tolerance" and gaining perspective

The target audience are students in German studies (Socrates and other scholarship holders) aged between 20 – 25, of Czech and Slovak nationality, gender: male and female, number of participants: approx. 25. Their language proficiency: B1-B2, working language is German (or Czech).

The course is planned for 8 hours, always in May during summer semester for all nominated Socrates students.

Experienced Socrates students are also invited to participate in this course to share their experiences in various intercultural situations with the participants. They play a particularly important role in the course - sharing their intercultural experiences and offering tangible examples of what they experienced during their studies abroad.

The course is planned as follows:

1. A **questionnaire** "How am I and how are the others?" serves as an **introduction** to the problem. It includes question about in-groups, out-groups and prejudices. The questionnaire helps sensitise students to the subject matter and fulfils significant educational and training goals. Course participants help in the statistical analysis of the responses by creating tables and graphical illustrations of the results obtained.
2. The next stage is a **discussion** on the results of the questionnaire.
3. The students then create an **associogram** on the concept of culture. A discussion about cultural standards leads participants to an expanded concept of the term "culture".
4. **Brainstorming** on the following question: In which areas of communication or intercultural communication can problems and misunderstanding occur? Participants gather ideas.
5. A **metaplan** is generated from these ideas, i.e. participants place them in various thematic groups.
6. From these groups and with the help of **mind mapping**, participants search for possible associations to individual concepts. This exercise forms the basis for the next step – role play.

7. The students formulate problematic intercultural situations. They then use **role play** to search for possible solutions to the real-life situations.

8. To supplement the process, the students **work with texts** that contain intercultural content, where discourse analysis, discussion and comparison are the primary focus.

Objective of this training: Above all, to change the thinking of the students about intercultural situations. Graduates should be able to initiate and foster new intercultural contacts without obstacles and misunderstandings. It is important to learn to accept different **perspectives** in terms of intercultural contacts.

Of course, stumbling blocks are expected, e.g. the students are asked to complete the questionnaire in the target language (German), which should also help to further develop their command of the language. However, it is quite demanding (their vocabulary may not suffice) so their native language can also be used on the survey. The exercise will also expose other problems.

The CHAGAL project is aimed at opening access to higher education for "CHAGAL students", which also includes student applicants from the new EU countries. This example of good practice represents one of several possible ways to prepare students for successful intercultural communication.

Examples of literature used in the course:

HERINGER, H.J. *Interkulturelle Kommunikation (Title translation: Intercultural Communication)*. Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2004.

PEASE, A. and B. *Der tote Fisch in der Hand (Title translation: The Definitive Book of Body Language)*. Ulm: Ullstein Verlag, 2003.

HANSEN, M.; Zuber, B. *Zwischen den Kulturen (Title translation: Between Cultures)*. Munich: Langenscheidt, 1996.

LUNDQUIST-MOG, A. *Spielarten : Arbeitsbuch zur deutschen Landeskunde (Title translation: Variety: Workbook for German Regional and Cultural Studies)* . Berlin; Munich: Langenscheidt, 1996.