Second medium-term programme of activities 2004-2007

Project B3 – ICOPROMO:
Intercultural Competence for Professional Mobility

Report of Central Workshop 5/2005

(Graz, Austria, 27-29 October 2005)

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Working languages:

English and French

The report can be accessed in English and French on the ECML website: **http://www.ecml.at**

The Executive Director of the ECML should be informed about any full or partial translation of the report and a copy of the translation should be sent to the ECML for information.

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Introduction

The ICOPROMO workshop was held 27th-29th October 2005 in the premises of ECML in Graz, Austria. Altogether 21 participants representing 20 different nationalities attended the workshop. They were professionals involved in intercultural communication, education and teacher training in their home countries.

The rationale of the ICOPROMO project (Intercultural Competence for Professional Mobility) is to develop competencies that allow a more flexible and critical workforce that is more attentive to the subtleties of intercultural communication and interaction. Special focus of the project is on intercultural competence in professional contexts and in multicultural teams. In practice, the project objective is to develop a model of intercultural competence and a number of training activities to enhance professional mobility among the European workforce (employees and managers).

The purpose of the workshop was to introduce a tentative model of intercultural competence and to test the training activities developed so far. Participants of the workshop were to evaluate the model and training activities and provide their suggestions for further improvements.

Day 1

Project co-ordinator Evelyne Glaser opened the workshop and welcomed participants. Adrian Butler, Executive Director of ECML, gave a general presentation on ECML and its activities. The programme continued with participants and project team members introducing themselves.

Manuela Guilherme presented the tentative model of intercultural competence. She briefly covered the theoretical background of the model. The current model has been influenced by previous research in various disciplines such as intercultural communication, critical pedagogy, foreign language/culture education and intercultural psychology. The tentative model identifies dispositions, competencies and challenges as the main elements of intercultural competence and takes into account the roles of interlanguage and interculture and continuous processes of learning and unlearning. Elements included in the model were covered in more detail in later presentations.

During the final part of the morning session participants discussed articles that had been sent to them prior to the workshop. The articles covered key aspects of the use of English in Europe, competencies needed for managing a multicultural workgroup and language diversity in international management teams.

Evelyne Glaser started the afternoon session by introducing the ICOPROMO model of intercultural competence. The model identifies attitudes, values, beliefs, emotions and motivation as dispositions that have an effect on intercultural interaction. Glaser noted that differences in dispositions are often a source of frustration in intercultural encounters. Successful intercultural communication requires an ability to be aware of the effects of dispositions and to regulate one's emotions in order to be able to cope with diversity.

Three training activities were tested during the afternoon session. The first activity "What I am/have/should" is intended for members of a multicultural team to get to know each other and build mutual trust by writing down and discussing statements about themselves in small groups. The second activity "Where do I belong" concentrates on emotion management and has been designed to deal with the topic of exclusion from a group. The third activity ("My preferences + your preferences = conflict?") aims at creating self-awareness of one's own and others' (culture-related) preferences regarding working styles and their influence on team dynamics. Participants discussed their preferences in small groups and then shared the results with others.

Day 2

Friday morning was dedicated to practicing ethnographic skills. To this aim two site visits to the Graz International Bilingual School and a Graz-based international company, AVL, were arranged. Participants split into two groups to attend one of the site visits and to make observations on issues related to languages, communication and issues related to the integration of members of other cultures. Participants were required to observe whether the aims pertaining to intercultural issues defined in the mission statements of these two organisations were actually translated into everyday life. The participants visiting the school were given a presentation of the school's activities and were allowed to follow classes. At AVL, participants were first given an introduction to the company in general and its intercultural training in particular. Later the visitors were given the opportunity to interview some international employees of the company on issues related to integration and intercultural training.

Participants were asked to make observations on what they saw and heard during the visits and compare this to the information material they had received prior to their visits. Observations were discussed in a debriefing session the same afternoon. Most participants found the site visits very interesting and their observations generated a lot of discussion.

Maria del Carmen Mendez Garcia then presented the topic of "competencies" within the ICOPROMO model. The competencies required in intercultural encounters were defined as intercultural communication, cultural knowledge, perspective-taking and sense-making. Intercultural communication includes both non-verbal communication (for example body language, proxemics, oculesis, haptics) and language awareness (for example awareness of the language of the encounter, native languages and communication styles). Cultural knowledge includes culture-general knowledge as well as culture-specific knowledge of a given society. Perspective-taking means empathy, flexibility, understanding, opening one's horizon and putting oneself into somebody else's shoes, whereas sense-making refers to skills of interpreting documents/events from the target culture and relating them to one's own culture. Sense-making refers also to the skills needed to acquire new cultural knowledge.

The presentation was followed by a training activity "I speak English, I am literate". Participants discussed the need for a global language in the modern world, advantages and disadvantages of English as a global language and the possible implications this might have on power relations between native and non-native speakers of English. Participants had differing opinions as to whether English was in fact a global language and whether being a native speaker provided a power advantage. Another scheduled activity "Non verbal communication" had to be postponed to the following day due to time constraints.

Day 3

Manuela Guilherme presented the topic "challenges" from the ICOPROMO model. She divided challenges of intercultural encounters into conflicts, power relations and intercultural ethics. For example, different notions of human dignity, political dimension and cultural aspects of language may create challenges in intercultural encounters. Development of intercultural freedom requires control of the fear of the unknown, promotion of a critical mind and enhancement of self-development.

Two training activities, "Who is talking funny" and "The Common and the Divergent", followed the presentation. During the activities participants reflected on different cultural values and discussed the effects of a non-standard accent in a team setting. The prejudice that an accent can possibly evoke was the subject of particular discussion. Some participants felt that an accent or other paralinguistic features were irrelevant while others emphasised the importance of unconscious attitudes related to such issues. During the activity "Non-verbal communication" (postponed from the previous day) participants discussed images of different gestures and compared the interpretations of gestures in different cultures.

After each activity participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form. Overall, the activities were evaluated to be useful and some participants suggested modifications to further improve their effectiveness.

During the final session of the workshop, participants were invited to present critical views and suggestions for further development of the ICOPROMO model of intercultural competence. Participants formed small groups to discuss the model. The following issues were raised in their presentations:

- The concept of identity was proposed to be included in the dispositions, together with various factors that can influence it.

- Interaction between different elements of the model should be clarified.

- Social and professional contexts affect dispositions and should be included in the model.

- The question was raised as to how dispositions could develop into competencies.

- Dispositions and competencies seem to form a coherent entity whereas the concept of challenges seems to differ from the other elements.

- The term "unlearning" could be replaced by "unfreezing".

- The actual form of the model - the layered circle - could be replaced by individual but overlapping circles

At the end of the workshop all participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form on the content and organisation of the workshop. Feedback gathered from these forms was mostly positive. A vast majority of participants stated that the workshop had met their expectations and that its content was relevant to their particular needs. Many of them also reported that they intended to use the activities introduced in the workshop in their own professional contexts. Suggestions for future activities included dissemination measures, for example organising more seminars or other events, and the development of some training activities tailored to the specific needs of particular professional groups.