

INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR PROMOTING AND ASSESSING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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This paper presents an intercultural training program that was developed by the Center for Intercultural Learning at the European University Viadrina in cooperation with students. A few of the student-generated activities will be described in detail. The program, aimed at enabling students to acquire intercultural competence, was developed at an international university on the German-Polish border, and with the special situation, needs and experiences of this place in mind. Local students were involved in creating the program by developing methods and exercises based on their own experiences. As the concept of intercultural competence constitutes the theoretical basis of the program, I first introduce the model we worked with. Then, I outline how the students were involved in the program's development, and I describe some especially innovative methods that arose from the students' rich experience and creativity. In this context I describe a model for peer assessment of intercultural competence. The methods depicted serve as examples for the methods that were created within the program and as examples for a new approach to classic intercultural methods such as role-plays and Critical Incident Analysis. It is shown that those methods can be used to achieve a holistic learning effect, which corresponds to the complex concept of culture and intercultural competence.

INTRODUCTION

The European University Viadrina at Frankfurt (Oder) represents an international institution of modern Europe, which is increasingly intertwined and interconnected. With 25% international students from over 70 countries, an extensive network of partner universities and many international programs frequented by its students, it is a precursor to a cross-border university that seeks to prepare its graduates for the globalized world. That means that one of the university's educational missions is to help students acquire intercultural competence beyond the expert knowledge of the

discipline-specific field. The creation of the program that I am presenting here emerged from the perception that an institution like the European University Viadrina, where students come from many different countries, should offer adequate measures to promote the development of intercultural competence, which has become an internationally acknowledged key qualification (Bertelsmann Foundation 2008). Viadrina was planned to be international from its very beginning.¹ But most of the other German universities have only recently been challenged with the huge process of internationalization that is presently emerging. It stands to reason that the challenges and experiences that we have encountered at the Viadrina can be transferred to other universities.

To begin, I will briefly outline why we consider such a program not only an enriching but also an essential element for the international landscape of Higher Education in several aspects (more details in Hiller, 2010a). Currently, both the rapid globalization process and the European policy of furthering intercultural competences are forcing institutions to admit that graduates must be prepared for the challenges that result from the growing number of international contacts. Thus, another reason for the promotion of intercultural competence is that if German universities want to be attractive to international students, they must take the intercultural dimension into consideration more seriously than they have until now.

The internal structure of institutions like Viadrina with its diverse international student body, highly frequented exchange programs and many international study programs, generates new challenges in daily cooperation with foreign institutions, administration, teaching and scholarly or scientific cooperation. Thus, all actors, including faculty, staff and students have to develop strategies to cope with the challenges caused by clashes of university systems: different administrative procedures, different communication and learning styles, different expectations concerning teaching, supervising and professor-student relationship, language barriers, and so forth (cf. v. Queis, 2009; Hiller, 2010b). Furthermore, the location itself at the German–Polish border impacts daily life and creates unpredictable situations (cf. Hiller, 2007). In addition to this, one of the goals of the Bologna Process² in Europe, which aims to create a common European Higher

¹ European University Viadrina is one of the few universities that were founded after the reunification of Germany. Its location on the German-Polish border had a highly symbolic political meaning. From its very beginning, 40% of its students have been foreign (i.e., non-German), and both research and study programs are supposed to have an international (preferably Eastern European) focus.

² According to the website of the European Commission, the Bologna Process seeks to create a “European Higher Education Area by 2010, in which students can choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures. The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 has put in motion a series of reforms needed to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents.” (http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm).

Education standard for European universities, is that students gain not only expert knowledge, but that they also acquire key competences. Intercultural competence is one of those required core competences (Nünning, 2008). With reference to the situation in Germany in particular, another important point is that several studies have shown that the integration of foreign students is rather poor. At Viadrina, we found that students tend to form national groups and maintain distance from one another. The communicative interaction between these groups is very limited (Hiller, 2007; Gröppel-Klein, Germelmann, & Glaum, 2005). In general in Germany, their rate of study failure is strikingly high (e.g., Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007; Knapp & Schumann, 2008). This last finding is especially alarming to many of the official institutions, such as the DAAD (the German Academic Exchange Service), which recently decided that it is now of critical importance to support universities in promoting intercultural competence. As a consequence, the number of training programs is currently increasing. It has become evident that intercultural learning happens only when the institution supports the process with special measures, and that integration and intercultural interaction is only successful when the institution itself is interculturally competent. Findings that students should be prepared as early as possible to cope with cultural differences are not new (cf. Furnham & Bochner, 1986), but besides sending students abroad through international exchange programs, there have hardly been any measures offered by the universities themselves.

Due to these perceptions, within a period of two years we gradually created at Viadrina a course program within the Center for Intercultural Learning to deal with promoting intercultural competence (cf. Hiller & Woźniak, 2009a, 2009b). Our goal was to get as many students involved as possible, to sensitize them to intercultural topics, to promote intercultural interaction on campus and to train them in intercultural competence. This necessitated a) a clear concept of intercultural competence, b) ideas of how to get students involved, i.e., interested in the topic, c) good methods. We learned that an institution such as Viadrina should offer a wide range of possibilities to further intercultural communication. In addition to intercultural workshops and training sessions, there could be activities such as international group projects, summer courses, cultural events or excursions. But these types of activity attract first and foremost students who are motivated to engage in intercultural exchange. As the aim was not to preach to the choir, we began to look for ways to get the maximum number of students involved in the intercultural competence program. Thus, one basic question was how to awaken interest in intercultural communication topics without forcing students to participate. Many students need motivation incentives that encourage them to take part in the given activities. One advantage was the curricular reforms made possible by the Bologna Process. To boost students' motivation to take part in the intercultural program, we made it possible for students in all degree programs to receive credit for participating in intercultural workshops. Here, the international focus of all the

study programs was certainly an advantage. With this, a general student acceptance of these intercultural activities was achieved. Every semester, from about 150 to 200 students take part in the workshops, and this is unique in Germany.

Hence, over the last three years a wide-ranging choice of seminars and workshops has been created at Viadrina, offering possibilities to interact with intercultural topics. The workshops are geared towards students from all departments and levels. Based on the concept of intercultural competence, which I will expose below, the workshops were designed to give the participants an impetus to gain insights into intercultural topics and to train their intercultural skills. They were also interactive in order to make the students communicate. Many students who had been studying at Viadrina for several semesters became aware of the multinational and also the interdisciplinary 'diversity' of the university for the first time during these workshops, and considered it to be surprisingly beneficial. In addition to gaining knowledge and experience through various exercises, this factor was often mentioned as positive by students from different national origins.³

Besides the very practical training workshops, another part of our program is seminars, which are also integrated into the curriculum for graduate and undergraduate students. While the workshops are focused more on practical issues and competence training, the seminars deal with topics concerning intercultural communication and competence issues with weekly meetings, which allow for deeper engagement. The methods presented here emerged mainly from those seminars.

In 2008, we received an Award for Intercultural Learning from the BMW Group Munich for having developed this program, which is considered an innovative contribution to the area of intercultural understanding. Since then we have participated in different programs for the promotion of intercultural competence in Germany's Higher Education system. Within the framework of the DAAD's PROFIN-Project, we invited students from universities all over Germany to participate in a special training program called PeerNet (cf. Dietze, 2010). The aim of the project is to share the know-how we acquired by developing our intercultural training program with other universities. With this, a network aimed at creating initiatives for promoting intercultural competence in Germany was brought to life. Within the framework of PeerNet, we recently published a handbook on intercultural competence in Higher Education that depicts the program, its theoretical foundation and methods (Hiller & Vogler-Lipp, 2010). Thus, the acquired knowledge is now available to a broader (German-speaking) public, and can be a basis for other institutions of Higher Education to develop intercultural competence programs. This article points out some major elements of the program, which are discussed in

³ This became evident by evaluating their feedback, cf. Hiller & Woźniak (2009b).

greater detail in the handbook. One important aspect is the understanding of intercultural competence, upon which our program and the methods are based.

THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE PROGRAM: OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

We understand culture as an open, penetrable, diffuse, contradictory and fluid construct that is interwoven, discursively produced, dependent on hierarchical power structures and encompasses factors such as gender, educational level, generation, religion and status (Breidenbach & Zukrigl, 1998; Moosmüller, 2004). Thus, culture is a collection of various co-existing offerings that are originated by human beings in (re-)action to their environment, interests and needs. Which offerings achieve acceptance and become/are made into norms depends on the predominant societal, political and economic power constellations. Apart from cultural differences other factors might have impact on the results of intercultural encounters. These can be structural, institutionalized, hierarchical power constellations or very simple issues such as personal disposition or assumptions about the other, in particular, prejudices. It can be said, for example, that such assumptions, and lack of reflection or flexibility may be responsible for unsatisfactory contact between people – or no contact at all (cf. Hiller & Woźniak, 2009a).

Considering the nature of intercultural interactions, we see intercultural competence as an open dynamic and complex construct, and, above all, a lifelong learning process. This competence is multi-dimensional in itself because in addition to knowledge about and understanding of other cultures, it includes a varied set of skills. Since the Intercultural Competence Learning Spiral based on Deardorff's model of intercultural competence depicts this idea very well, it serves as the basis for our model of intercultural competence, supplemented with some aspects (marked by a "+") (See Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Learning spiral of “intercultural competence” (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2008, based on the model of intercultural competence of Deardorff). We added those aspects that are marked by a “+”. (Hiller, 2010b)



The model distinguishes 4 dimensions: attitudes; comprehensive cultural knowledge and intercultural skills; an ability to reflect on intercultural issues as an internal outcome of intercultural competence; and an ability to interact constructively as an external outcome of intercultural competence. Those dimensions contain different skills, abilities and attitudes that are components of intercultural competence, and which enable the person to think, feel and act appropriately within a given situation: components that help the individual to evaluate the interactant and the situation/context correctly and to react flexibly and appropriately according to the circumstances prevailing at a given time and place.⁴ The basis of everything is the readiness to learn, according to Holzkamp’s theory of expansive learning motivation (Holzkamp, 1995). Without this readiness, even the best methods will not work. Pursuant to Deardorff, the more positive the attitude, the more knowledge and skills can be developed and the more often intercultural

⁴ In Hiller & Woźniak (2009a), the different approaches concerning appropriateness and effectiveness as goals of intercultural communication are discussed in detail.

situations are reflected or handled constructively, the more likely it is that a higher degree of intercultural competence will be achieved (cf. Bertelsmann Foundation, 2008).

Our program and the methods we work with are based on this understanding of intercultural competence. In the advanced workshops, students are engaged in assessing their peers, as I will present below, which requires them to study the model within theoretical units. In the subsequent practical training units, the abstract terms of the model can be transformed into experience when they are adapted to exercises, debriefing, and assessment. When students are required to assess their peers, they are given a special briefing for the skills selected (see below).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF METHODS FOR THE PROGRAM

As mentioned above, the program is founded on the realization that intercultural competence does not happen automatically when people from different nations meet under the same institutional context. Even when there aren't obvious conflicts, that does not mean that there is successful interaction. As presented above, the general goal of the program was to motivate the students of this particular international university at this particular location on the German-Polish border to become interested in intercultural interaction, to become sensitized to intercultural topics, and to receive training in their intercultural skills. Thus, we consider the training of intercultural competence a basic requirement for a successful intercultural institution. Soon after having started with the first training workshop in 2004, it became obvious through the participants' feedback that the workshops gave many of them important insights (cf. Hiller, 2006).

Before presenting some of our methods, I would like to underscore that our students have been engaged in the program's development from the very beginning. We are in the beneficial situation of having students who have had many intercultural experiences, which they bring to our program from the beginning. Students' background experiences in intercultural interaction emerge when they are asked to develop exercises for intercultural training. As the university has many study programs with a significant international orientation and a large number of students who go abroad especially during their undergraduate studies, from the very beginning there was a group that was very interested in intercultural topics and in the program as a whole. In addition to the intercultural workshop program, which targets students from all disciplines and departments, we have been offering graduate and undergraduate courses, which offered the possibility to study the topics at length.

In 2007, Viadrina started a Masters Program for Intercultural Communication Studies. Thus, we also have students who are focused on intercultural topics. So in addition to

theoretical discourse about intercultural communication topics, we offered a series of courses/seminars which dealt with practical questions such as how to teach intercultural competence, training contents, methods and training design. In those courses we discussed existing methods, practiced them and critiqued them. After that the students were invited to create new methods for intercultural training. What was at first meant to be a term paper to deepen their understanding of intercultural methods turned out to be a true treasure. Other new methods emerged when our training program grew so fast that we did not have enough staff for the training-classes. So we initiated a student-trainer training program, which was, in addition to the above mentioned theory and practice-classes, mainly based on assisting experienced trainers and learning to facilitate training modules under the supervision of an experienced trainer. These student trainers were also good resources for new methods, which they developed in preparation for their training units.

By the time we developed the concept for the above-mentioned handbook about intercultural competence in Higher Education, we already had a considerable collection of new methods. After reviewing them, we decided to publish the most interesting ones. The book contains a collection of about fifty intercultural exercises created by the students themselves. Most of the methods were developed within the framework of classes with intercultural topics. Others were designed from students from other universities within PeerNet, the above-mentioned intercultural trainer-education program for students. From the beginning we were impressed with the students' creativity and ability to apply their knowledge and intercultural experience to practice. What we find in the book are ice breakers, theater methods, discourse analysis, Visual Imagery, a method that uses music, communication and cooperation exercises, role-plays, movie analyses, and so forth. Due to the space limitations of this paper, I can only give a few examples of the methods here.

Four examples of diverse methods created by students

Example 1. Icebreaker

Speed Dating

With "Speed Dating," Joanna Karolina Prędką created an icebreaking-exercise which, every time we apply it, really does its job: to break the ice, to facilitate getting to know each other and to have fun. The exercise is based on the "speed dating" concept.⁵ It is very dynamic and everybody talks with everybody else. Under time pressure, the participants have to collect

⁵ Speed dating, according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, is "an event at which each participant converses individually with all the prospective partners for a few minutes in order to select those with whom dates are desired" (Speed dating, n.d.).

information about the others such as their background, intercultural experience and their expectations concerning the workshop.

Example 2. Coping with the language barrier

Suomi

This is an exercise that deals with the language barrier and was created by Tomasz Lis. “Suomi” seeks to decrease the anxiety towards language barriers, or towards learning an unknown language. At the same time the method aims at showing how content can be mediated without knowing the language.

All participants have to build sentences in a language they don’t know. They get a worksheet with a few basic words in a language that no one in the group typically knows. In the case of our exercise, this is Finnish. They receive basic information about the pronunciation and three pattern sentences in Finnish, such as:

- Minä olen Leijona – My zodiac sign is Leo
- Minun mieliväri on punainen = my favorite color is red
- Minä puhun suomea = I speak Finnish

All participants stand in a circle. One person has to stand in the middle of the circle, and build a sentence based on the words on the worksheet, giving information about him or herself (his/her zodiac sign, his/her favorite color, which language he/she knows).

All participants who share those characteristics join the person in the middle and touch him or her. After that, the next person goes to the middle of the circle.

The exercise creates a common ground because everybody has to use an unknown language. At the same time, the participants discover common characteristics. Because of the difficulties they have with pronouncing the unknown language, they usually have a lot of fun doing this exercise. Amongst others, this exercise is especially appropriate for international classes or a beginning language learning class because it can help to break down initial barriers and to integrate the group.

Example 3. Creative acting method

Hosts

The exercise “hosts“ by Stefanie Vogler-Lipp is a creative acting method that aims to sensitize participants for characteristic differences in another nationality. The activity is designed for bi-national workshop (e.g., with German and Polish students) with the goal of revealing and reflecting on existing stereotypes. “Hosts” encourages participants to put themselves into the position of the hosts and think about possible differences in the behavior of people from other nations while they are welcoming guests at their house. The scenario is the following:

All participants form homogeneous teams of 3 to 4 players per team from one country (if possible). Each group gathers characteristics of the other nation and writes them down. The overall question the group needs to answer: How do you think the other nation will receive a family at their house (assuming the guests and the hosts know each other from a mutual vacation years ago)? Then each group presents their findings to the audience. The best way to present the results is a short, creative, theatrical performance by the participants of each group (for example the group can act out the welcoming situation).

Because all participants are asked to put themselves in the position of reflecting on the competences of other countries, such as tolerance, the ability to feel empathy and acceptance of others are promoted. “Hosts” seeks to avoid stereotypes and raise the participants’ awareness of cultural differences. Confidence and independence are very important features of the game. The most important act within “hosts” is the debriefing session in which accusations or the like are not allowed. The discussion aims to disprove prejudices and stereotypes.

Example 4. Exercise about values

Values in proverbs – Auction of values

Kristín Draheim designed an exercise that focuses on culture-specific values on the one hand, and on general valuing and the accompanying emotions on the other hand. Its aim is to make the participants aware of their values, and the fact that they learned them through their specific languages in their cultures. The exercise includes single reflections and interactive, experience-based group work and consists of two main parts:

At first all individual participants collect several proverbs and sayings typical for their culture. It is of central importance that the proverbs and sayings really mean something to them, i.e., they have emotional resonance. The proverbs might be important because, e.g., they were often used by their parents or grandparents, or because they are often used by the media in their home countries, or for other reasons. One after another, the participants present the proverbs and sayings they chose and explain how, when, where and with what intention they are used in their home cultures. Also, they might point out what they mean to them personally or to the people in their home country and why. The other participants then have the chance to ask questions.

Then the group is asked to think about what values are expressed in the proverbs, i.e., what the proverbs allude to, hint at or tell one to do or to avoid doing. There are some proverbs in which only one value is expressed, and there might be others that include more than one.

Examples:

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. (value: health, moderate lifestyle)

The early bird catches the worm. (value: working on something right away, punctuality)

In the second part of the exercise, one list of up to 30 proverbs is made by the whole group. After that, all participants are asked to rank the values according to their importance individually. These individual rankings will be used for the following auction of values in which all participants have to purchase those values that are most important to them. Each participant has 10,000 Valutas (auction currency) that can be used in any amount to purchase the values by auction. Then the atmosphere of an official auction is created. The values are announced and auctioned one by one. The highest bid buys the value. This can be announced by using a hammer like in a real auction. The auction ends when all values have been sold. Finally the participants are debriefed on how they felt when they had to rank the values, when they didn't have enough money to bid for a value that was important for them, and what they thought when values that mean nothing to them sold at a high price. It is interesting to see whether the values they bought correspond with those in their proverbs. They reflect on and discuss the exercise and its results

These are a few examples of our collection of more than 50 methods that were created within the framework of our project. The short description of the exercises mentioned here shows that the students created a wide range of different methods, according to their individual preferences and their reflections about what participants of the workshop should experience or learn.

New Approaches to Classical Methods

We have also been using and testing classical intercultural methods such as traditional role-plays, culture assimilators and case studies based on Critical Incidents in our program. But as we repeatedly met with difficulties in applying them (see below), we discussed them critically with the students and began to develop alternatives. For example, the main argument against role-plays was that they are artificial and constructed, and participants could not identify with them.

Thus a number of students decided to create new role-plays that they found more "authentic" and comprehensible, and here as well a surprisingly large variety of different arrangements, designs and applications appeared. The most innovative method was a role-play which can also be used for the assessment of intercultural competence.

By describing two role-plays, I want to show how different their application can be. This might inspire the reader to create further variations. The peer assessment method,

which will be discussed in connection with Maja Woźniaks simulation role-play, can be combined with various kinds of role-plays. I will conclude with the presentation of a complex Critical Incident Analysis that can also be transformed into a method for role-play.

Using Classical Methods for a Holistic Learning Experience

Role-plays. According to Straub 2007, intercultural competence can be understood as an aspect of the personal acting potential that is displayed within the interpretation of the context and the situation. Intercultural competence therefore becomes evident particularly in behavior. A person may have highly developed intercultural knowledge and the best of intentions, but not be able to transfer it to behavior (Precht & Davidson-Lund, 2007). Classically, role-plays are used for training different communication and behavioral skills like negotiating and conflict resolution. The basic concept of role-plays is a dyadic role-play, which usually consists of a situation in which two somehow “differently poled” groups (cultures) have to interact. They reveal an unexpected behavior to each other that has to be handled in a certain way according to the aim of the exercise (e.g., sensitization to one’s own cultural imprint).

Some experts view role-plays, in which the participants can experience whether their behavior is evaluated as appropriate through the reaction of the counterpart, as a promising method for the assessment of intercultural competence (e.g., Mayrhofer et al., 2007). The development of the intercultural competence of the participants is therefore already stimulated during the course of testing. Role-plays offer the framework for dialogues and negotiations, which are crucial tasks in most encounters. How role-plays can be connected with peer assessment will be shown through the illustration of “archivum 2060”.

Maja Woźniak designed the simulation role-play Archivum 2060, which I consider an excellent tool because it kills several birds with one stone:

- a) the participants can be trained on different skills;
- b) the scenario is ingenious, that means, she invented a “good story” for her simulation, which, although it is constructed, makes it easy for the participants to identify and get involved;
- c) although complex in design and learning goals, the role-play is not too laborious to explain and apply;
- d) the special feature of Maja Woźniaks role-play design is the concept of using it as a tool for peer assessment;

e) all students present are involved as players, assessors or assessees, and everybody can deepen his/her/their understanding of specific intercultural skills.

Accordingly, in addition to the simulation role-play, she also designed a whole process for briefing the student assessors and developed assessment sheets. This concept can be transferred to the other kinds of role-plays that are presented in this paper. Thus after a description of the exercise, I will describe the assessment process. The four evaluation sheets are included in Appendix A.

Simulation role-play Archivum 2060⁶

The theme is the preparation of the international art-exhibition “Archivum 2060”, which is being organized by two teams from different cultures. The groups meet in order to decide about the arrangement of twelve pieces of art. The “intercultural” challenge that occurs is the collision of divergent forms of perception and its expression, resulting in different ways of classification and thus, dissimilar conceptions of the arrangement of the pieces of art. While the team of candidates is instructed to classify the pieces of art according to three categories (animals, landscapes and geometric figures), the team of role-players is instructed to classify the pieces of art according to colors, which are linked to emotions (red = anger, green = happiness, blue = sadness).

The role-play starts when the group of candidates enters the room. After the exercise is introduced, the PowerPoint presentation is screened. The candidates are confronted with the emotional rollercoaster of the role-players for the first time. The role-players comment on the various pieces of art and express their feelings, depending on which picture is being shown. After the presentation, the players suggest their concept of arrangement, displaying it on a drawing on the table. The candidates are confronted with the specific behavior of the role-players for the second time, for example: being enthusiastic when talking about the happiness-room, while turning sad when touching the cards with art-pieces from the sadness room.

The fact that the players only have a different perception of the pieces of art is for many students easier to accept than giving the two cultures artificial cultural attributes, which is practiced in many role-play activities. According to the feedback of the students who participated in the game, the focus on perception and emotions makes it easy to place themselves in the scenario.

The peer assessment process. As mentioned above, in addition to being a method that allows an intercultural learning experience, “Archivum 2060” is constructed as a tool to assess intercultural skills. Thus, Maja Woźniak selected behavioral flexibility and empathy as two skills that can be measured in this exercise.

⁶ The entire role-play is published in Hiller & Vogler-Lipp (2010) in German.

For the role-play, the participants are divided into three groups: the candidates, whose intercultural competence is tested (the assessees), the group of role-players who challenge their intercultural competence, and the observers (the assessors).

The observers receive an information sheet and an observation chart. The information sheet consists of precise definitions of behavioral flexibility and empathy, as well as their positive and negative dimensions. The evaluation chart shows the relevant evaluation criteria (see Appendix 1). The observers have time to study the information sheet and the evaluation chart as a basis for their observation. Furthermore, they have to decide who will observe which candidate (each candidate has two observers), and where to sit for a good view of their chosen candidate. When the role-play is over, the observers give feedback to their assessees, based on the evaluation of the observers according to the defined criteria on the sheet. After this, the role-players are asked to express their impression of the role-play. This is an important step, considering the fact that intercultural competence is evaluated by the interacting counterparts - whether the course of action was considered to be desirable or not and if loss of face was experienced.

Of course the concept of Woźniak's peer assessment is applicable to other role-plays we use in our program. We tested this kind of competence assessment in several seminars, and the students confirmed that this kind of assessment is much more fruitful than, for example, often used self-assessment questionnaires. So, in addition to being a training method, we consider that role-plays can be a way to give students feedback about the competences reflected in their behavior. At the same time, this kind of exercise - simultaneously giving the players the possibility to master an intercultural challenge, and the observers the chance to assess their peers - evokes an especially intense foundation for feedback discussion. Thus the students can benefit from it on different levels. The outcome is rich and varied, because in addition to its assessment possibilities, the method trains among other things the students' observational, analytic and reflection skills.

Critical Incidents. Another classical method for training is the work with Critical Incidents.⁷ For our program we constructed new analysis methods that correspond to our understanding of culture, and accordingly allow a complex exploration of critical situations. The analysis of such cases of critical interaction can be displayed theoretically, that is, cognitively or, even better, also as a role-play (the variation has to be selected according to the setting, i.e., how many participants, how much time, learning goals, etc.).

In intercultural contexts, Critical Incidents refer to situations in which a misunderstanding, problem or conflict arises due to cultural differences between people

⁷ Critical incidents are originally defined as interaction situations "which the American finds conflictful, puzzling, or which he is likely to misinterpret; and [...] which can be interpreted in a fairly unequivocal manner, given sufficient knowledge about the culture" (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971, p. 97).

in interaction with each other. Mainly, Critical Incident activities have taken the form of cultural assimilators and/or are based on attribution of simple, repetitive cultural features. The most wide-spread criticism is that Critical Incident-Analyses simplify complex situations and reduce them to their cultural aspects (e.g., Bolten, 2002). This kind of criticism is also often brought up by participants in intercultural training when working with Critical Incidents, especially when the protagonists in the case studies are of the same nationalities as some of the training participants. As a result, we developed several new methods that go far beyond the classical Critical Incident-Analysis. Thus for example, “storks and statistics” was created by Marina Palazova, Marieke C. Söffker and Boglárka Várkonyi, an international student group who transferred their own experiences into the scenario. The exercise is a combination of Critical Incident Analysis and role-play, but also goes beyond that because the participants have to develop several actions or solution strategies and discuss them.

A combination of Critical Incident Analysis and role-play 1: Storks and statistics

The exercise/activity is in the form of a dialogue, and contains a short Critical Incident situation in which 2 students (A and B, e.g., a German host and an international student), have a conversation. The situation ends in disappointment for the international student.

First, the trainers play the situation and the participants watch the scene. Then, the participants get together in small groups and are asked to work out solutions for the situation. Group 1 gets the task of taking over the perspective of A, and finding out how her behavior could be changed so that the situation would not end in disappointment. B’s behavior should stay the same. Group 2 has to take over the perspective of B, and find out how her behavior could be changed so that the situation would not end in disappointment. A’s behavior should stay the same.

Group 3 has to take over the perspective of A, and find out how her behavior could be changed so that the situation would not end with a disappointment. Here the behavior of both protagonists can be changed.

Group 4 has to take over the perspective of B, and find out how her behavior could be changed so that the situation would not end in disappointment. Here too, the behavior of both protagonists can be changed.

Then the groups play out their solutions in a role-play. After that, all participants discuss the different solution strategies.

The next method allows for participants to explore situational-, cultural- and individual-driven factors that influence intercultural interaction. In a second step, it can be transferred to a role-play. Using the framework of a complex Critical Incident Analysis, the participants should develop a variety of perspectives within the process of interpretation, which are often left unconsidered in one’s own experiences. So the Critical Incident that we use in that kind of exercise has been purposely chosen not to

be easily explainable through cultural criteria, but consists rather of a variety of possible culturally specific and situational behaviors. This method of analysis is appropriate for training a variety of perspectives, the same as “storks and statistics” but it is even more complex because it also considers structural factors related to hierarchy, power, institutional frameworks, and so forth.

The method can be depicted as follows:

Critical Incident Analysis with role-play variation: On the train:⁸

The workshop leader/trainer introduces the concept of Critical Incident, and announces the Critical Incident exercise.

The Critical Incident that is used in this kind of exercise may not be easily explained through culture, but consists rather of a variety of behaviors. The learning objective here is that the participants understand the complexity of communicative interaction. The Critical Incident should contrast a “classical” Critical Incident that can only be explained through cultural criteria.⁹

The participants receive a worksheet with the Critical Incident, and have approximately 5 minutes to read it. Then they are supposed to answer different questions like the following as spontaneously as possible:

- Is this an intercultural Critical Incident?
- What is the protagonists' point of view?
- Do you think this Critical Incident exhibits attitudes which are characteristic for a certain culture?
- What other factors could also have influenced the situation?

After this short period of reflection the workshop leader asks for the group's general opinion: “Who believes this Critical Incident is of an intercultural nature?” In order to answer this question, the workshop leader/trainer assigns three areas in the room, labeling one with “Agree,” another with “Undecided,” and the last one with “Disagree.” Then s/he asks the participants to choose one of the assigned three areas in the room to answer the question. At this point, the workshop leader may ask some participants why they chose that particular answer. In order to avoid anticipating the analysis included in the second part of the exercise,

⁸ Created by the author of this article.

⁹ They are used in Culture Assimilators. In Hiller & Vogler-Lipp (2010c, pp. 326-328) a Critical Incident-situation is described, which takes place in a train compartment. The train runs from Poland to Germany, and the critical situation happens between a German professor and a Polish conductor. Other travelers who interfere in the situation also play a role. The situation might be influenced by cultural, but also by institutional, hierarchical and power factors. This case allows for different levels of analysis and interpretation.

the workshop leader asks the participants to return to their area after expressing their reasoning.

In the second part, the workshop leader introduces the CPS (Culture-person- situation) model through which participants explore the situational-, cultural- and individual-driven factors (cf. Bosse, 2010). Then s/he hands out the worksheet with the CPS model which has key questions to stimulate reflection on one's own intercultural experiences (see Appendix 2), which offers the basis on which Critical Incidents can be analyzed. In small groups using the key questions, the participants identify the situational-, cultural- and individual-driven factors, which could have influenced the situation. After exchanging their results with each other in their groups, the participants come back together as an entire group to discuss further perspectives of interpretation.

At the same time, the workshop leader may refer to the fact that the variety of perspectives within the process of interpretation is often left unconsidered. Consequently, experiences often comprise misconstructions of communicative behavior.

Transferring the Critical Incident Analysis into a role-play

version1:

The workshop leader can ask the participants to perform the given situation with the task of using new communication strategies.

version 2:

Different perspectives can be revealed by asking the participants to put themselves in the shoes of one of the people involved. Now the participants can tell the story from the perspective of the involved person.

The methods exposed in this paper are supposed to show how "classics" such as role-plays and Critical Incident Analysis can be adapted to different learning goals, and can go far beyond mere patterns of cultural attribution and explanation.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed the development of an intercultural training program at the European University Viadrina, and how new methods were created within the program. I have shown that by involving students in the creation of a program for their peers, we were able to design a series of innovative methods for intercultural training. Some of the classical methods were intensively discussed during the program's development, and as a consequence, simulation, role-plays and Critical Incident Analyses were re-designed, supplemented and adapted to a contemporary, dynamic understanding of culture. At the same time, with these new approaches, we reacted to common

criticisms of and points of resistance against methods that are based merely on cultural attributes and explanation patterns. In addition, one of the (former) students developed a model to assess intercultural competence using role-plays. As experience shows, students, if engaged in assessing their peers' behavior, gain a deeper understanding of intercultural competence.

As we understand intercultural learning (i.e., acquisition of intercultural competence) as a gradual, never ending learning process, we favor training methods which allow for complex and holistic learning effects. The methods presented here represent examples for tailor-made methods for intercultural learning in the academic field, and can be applied in intercultural workshops for newcomers as well as in language learning classes or, for example, in a class to prepare students to go abroad for a semester.

The internationalization process is moving forward fast, not only in European Higher Education, but in different areas all over the world as well. Thus, intercultural competence training for students will become more and more relevant¹⁰. Programs and adequate training opportunities have to be developed according to the needs of specific institutions. The program presented here was developed by scholars in cooperation with students. The student-produced methods have been successful in our program because they were developed by peers for peers, and they assimilate the experiences and questions the students have concerning intercultural topics. Moreover, they are often very creative and innovative, and open up a space in which both learning and having fun are possible at the same time.

¹⁰ This refers to all kind of students, because probably all of them will live and work in an internationalized and globalized world. But some study programs especially require intercultural competence: E.g. more and more, intercultural competence is considered a key component in educating global language teachers, and it is evident that in language education there will also be new challenges. For example, at the Second International Conference on the Development and Assessment of Intercultural Competence in Tucson, Arizona, in January 2010, the keynote speaker Dr. Jun Liu argued that because of the official Chinese language teaching policy, a multitude of interculturally competent Chinese teachers should be trained to teach Chinese worldwide.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX A 1**Information sheet for observer**

Your task as the observer is to watch and to evaluate the behaviour of the candidates (members of TEAM A), whose intercultural competence is being challenged by a specific behaviour of the role-players (members of TEAM B).

The “intercultural challenge” which occurs is the collision of divergent forms of perception and its expression, resulting in different ways of classification and hence dissimilar conceptions of the arrangement of the pieces of art.

While the team of the candidates is instructed to group the pieces of art according to three categories (animals, landscapes and geometrical figures), the team of the role-players is instructed to arrange the pieces of art according to colours (red, green, blue).

The aggravating factor comes into play through the fact that the colours are associated with three emotions (red = anger, green = happiness, blue = sadness). Therefore, according to the role-players’ perception only those pictures can be displayed in one room, that belong to the same group of colour/emotion.

Each candidate is being evaluated with the aid of the evaluation sheet provided below.

1. Please decide first, who is going to observe which candidate.
2. Make sure you have a good view to observe the candidate you have picked.
3. Read the evaluation sheet carefully before the role-play starts.

APPENDIX A 2

Evaluation sheet – intercultural competent EMPATHY

Definition: Intercultural competent empathy is the willingness and ability to switch one's own perspective and to successfully try to understand the feelings, expectations and wishes of the other opposing person. It is the ability to interpret the behaviour of the other opposing person correctly at that time and place. Empathy is connected with the knowledge that the behaviour of the person one is interacting with often can't be evaluated and interpreted by making use of one's own cultural standards. People with intercultural competent empathy are able to take culture-specific perspectives which have been developed through the interaction with people with different cultural backgrounds. This ability is called *interculturally competent empathy*.

Please indicate by marking on the scale provided to what extent the following statements apply.

The candidate ...

	strongly disagree ... strongly agree			
	1	2	3	4
...recognises quickly the somehow "different" behaviour of TEAM B (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...remains in his/her own perspective (-)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...is showing willingness to take the perspective of TEAM B (e.g. is asking for the reason of the behaviour) (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...notices that the members of TEAM B are angry, sad or happy (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...shows appreciation for the different perception of the role-players (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...discusses and compares the divergent forms of classification (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remark: Every statement is followed by a plus or minus sign in brackets. The plus (+) refers to the positive occurrence of intercultural competent empathy. The minus (-) refers to its non-occurrence.

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree

Notes:

APPENDIX A 3

Evaluation sheet – intercultural competent BEHAVIOURAL FLEXIBILITY

Definition: Interculturally competent behaviour flexibility is the ability to adjust fast to changing conditions and to have a distinct behaviour repertoire.

People with intercultural competent flexibility are aware of the impact of their own actions and are able to reflect them. They are able to reveal adequate behaviour in interactions with people with different cultural backgrounds. They are able to understand the situation and to recognize expectations, which they can easily conform to. At the same time the intercultural competent person only adjusts his/her behaviour when he/she is sure that adjustment is required and considered to be adequate.

This ability is called *intercultural competent behavioural flexibility*.

Please indicate by marking on the scale provided to what extent the following statements apply.

The candidate...

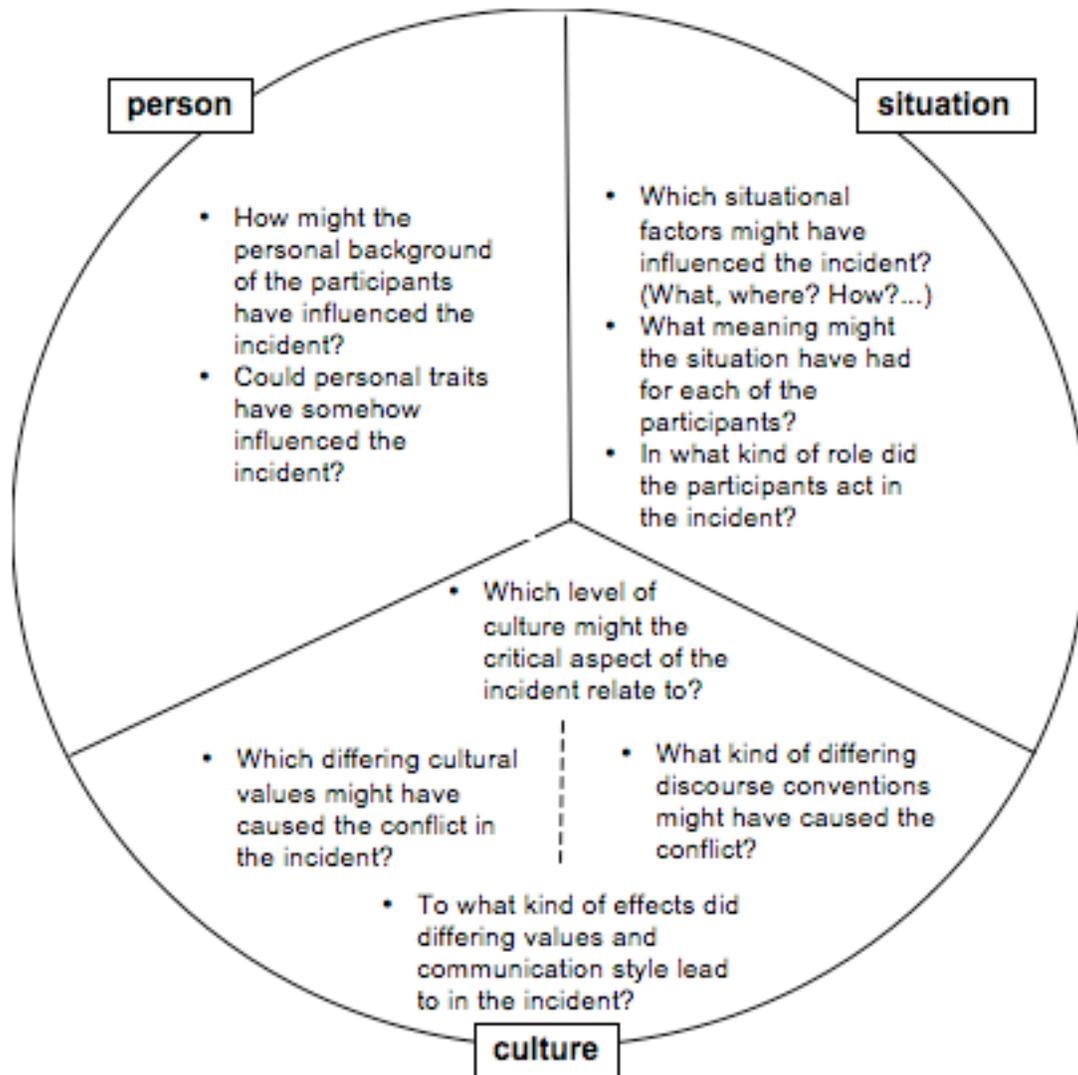
	strongly disagree ... strongly agree			
	1	2	3	4
...takes on a defensive stance towards the situation (-)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...views the divergent classification approach of TEAM B as an enrichment for the exhibition and his/her own team (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...is willing to adjust (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...imitates the reactions of TEAM B during the PowerPoint presentation and discussion without making fun of it (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...is open-minded and flexible with regard to diverse suggestions and solutions for the arrangement of the art pieces (+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remark: Every statement is followed by a plus or minus sign in braces. The plus (+) refers to the positive occurrence of intercultural competent behavioural flexibility. The minus (-) refers to its non- occurrence.

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree

Notes:

APPENDIX B -- Reflection & Analysis of Critical Incidents: C-P-S-Model



Source: Bosse, 2010