

Teaching Intercultural Communication- (Part 2) Half-Day Training Program

Rapid globalization, technological advancements, and greater international political, commercial and cultural cooperation and integration is continuously shrinking the world and bringing it closer. A growing number of people now identify with the term 'global citizens' residing in a 'global village'. Though this has allowed for a greater intercultural communication and more comprehensive exchange of information across the world, it has also given rise to a number of problems arising as a result of interculturally incompetent work environments and work-forces. With growing diversity across workplaces and educational institutions, it has now become more important than ever to train and develop an interculturally competent and culturally intelligent global work force. Greater global integration and communication has also lead to higher cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in the classroom. As such, training educators and teachers and equipping them with the required attitudes, knowledge and skills to deal with and facilitate learning within such environments, is a necessity. Being interculturally incompetent leads to breakdown of communication, omission of information, rigidity, and classroom discrimination (Kane, A., 2013). Cultural intelligence is the need of the hour- not just for students but also for teachers. With this in mind, this paper aims to design a five-hour (half day) intercultural training program for professors teaching culturally diverse undergraduate classrooms at international universities. The assumed group size for the purpose of creating and designing such activities is fifteen professors from different academic departments across the university.

Teachers of multi-cultural classrooms have a responsibility to do more than just disseminate information about pre-set curriculum, it is imperative for them to firstly recognize gaps in their own cultural competency and thereby attempt to fill said gaps, and secondly to ensure equal opportunities for academic success, personal fulfillment and cultural development of their students (Chisholm, M. I., 1994). Keeping this in mind, and w.r.t Deardorff's model of intercultural competence, the main aim of this program is successful interaction between teachers and students, to develop attitudes of warmth, empathy and adaptability, to impart necessary knowledge by way of practical examples and to instill within the professors, the skills required for them to apply said knowledge and thereby display higher cultural intelligence. Before designing any training program however, it is important to decide between a model of culture-specific or culture-general training. Culture-general training with a culture dialogue approach focuses on honing intercultural communicative skills, fostering self-awareness of cultural competency and development of personality characteristics as opposed to considering cultural differences as barriers. As such, it is the most effective approach for the training module designed for the chosen group of participants.

Module of Training

Group Profile: International University Professors Teaching Multi-Cultural Undergraduate Classrooms

Group Size: 15 participants, divided into groups of 3

Training Schedule: 4 hours including a 30-minute break

Activities

Ice Breakers (20 minutes):

In any training program, it is important for each participant to feel comfortable w.r.t the training environment and the other members of the training group. To this end, it is important to acclimatize the members to both- the team and the training space. Comfort, warmth and openness towards members often stems from a mutual feeling of trust and dependability amongst the team, and comfort with the training space comes from awareness, especially cognitive and spacial awareness of said space. For the purpose of this, the following two activities have been conceptualized as ice-breakers:

1. With the major goal to primarily awaken and increase alertness amongst the members, the first activity is a game of catch with a twist. As part of this activity, the 15 participants form a circle in the center of the room. To start off, the trainer randomly throws a small rubber

stress ball toward a member, who must introduce themselves- full name and academic faculty upon catching the ball. The game continues and the ball is thrown around the circle in this manner until all members have been introduced. This activity which lasts for 5 minutes, allows for familiarity and alertness among members.

2. For the final ice breaker, all participants are divided into teams of three (by way of calling out numbers). One member of each team is instructed to be mute for the duration of the game (member A), one member is instructed to be non-responsive to auditory stimuli (member B) and the third member is blindfolded (member C). An object is placed in a corner of the room, member A faces the object and member B stands facing member A (with their back to the object). The objective of the game is for member B to guide member C (blindfolded) toward the object, based solely on member A's signs and gestures- all in 5 minutes. This activity, which lasts for a total of 25 minutes, allows for increased trust and dependability amongst members and greater spacial awareness.

Activity 1 (20 Minutes):

A major part of any intercultural training program is development of intercultural sensitivity within its participants, and the development of such sensitivity is often subjective to the experience of the learners in question (Bennett, M.J., 1986). As Bennett states, "the key to such sensitivity and related skills in intercultural communication is the way in which the learners construe cultural difference". To this end, it is necessary to open the floor to dialogue about the what each member construes as cultural differences, cultural barriers to effective communication, and breakdown of information exchange within their classroom. For this activity, all members once again form a circle and the rubber stress ball returns. Just like in the first ice-breaker activity, the game continues with the ball being thrown and caught by different members and ends after 20 minutes. However, for the purpose of this activity, upon catching the ball, the member in question has to in one word or phrase mention or describe cultural differences noticed by them in their respective classrooms and what in their opinion is the biggest challenge or barrier posed by this cultural diversity in the classroom. While the members continue to throw the ball, the trainer lists the differences and challenges being stated, as a record for use in later activities.

Break (30 Minutes)

Activity 2 (35-40 Minutes)

For the purpose of this activity, the members will once again be divided into groups of three- the same groups as the ice breaking activity. The activity will start with the trainer declaring that only those teams who were successful in acquiring the object in the ice breaking activity, would be receiving an acknowledgement of completion of the training module; the rest of the teams would be required to re-take the module. The trainer will then proceed by asking the members to vocalise their reactions to the announcement and state their opinions and sentiments about it, while making a note of the same. Once all members and teams have expressed their sentiments, it will be made clear by the trainer that the previous announcement was hypothetical, and made only for the purpose of the activity.

At this point, the trainer will launch the second part of the activity. The participants will be asked to draw upon their sentiments and feelings from the above, and relate the same to a classroom situation: where students from multi-cultural backgrounds must try to function effectively and without hindrance, and succeed despite barriers posed to their learning ability and classroom functionality as a result of cultural differences and subsequent breakdown of communication and other classroom functions. Empathy is a person's ability to not only understand but also to share the feelings of others. it is the process of non-judgementally 'feeling-with' rather than feeling on behalf of another person (Noddings, 1984). In order to relate to their students, to facilitate positive interactions with and within culturally diverse students, to design student-centred practices, and to create supportive classrooms, teachers need to be interculturally sensitive and aware. An empathetic disposition in teachers has often been identified as a key trait for such sensitivity (Germain, 1998) especially since empathetic people are known to be more successful in taking on the perspective of cultures diverse to theirs and respond to an individual from that person's perspective (Goleman, 1998 and Oliner & Oliner, 1995). The main aim of the above activity is to increase emotional and cultural intelligence amongst teachers and allowing them to display greater

confidence and lesser social-anxiety in cross-cultural classroom environments.

Activity 3 (105 Minutes):

1. Part 1 (30 Minutes):

Two teams will be asked to assume the roles of students while three will continue to be the teachers. In the assigned roles, the groups will be asked to discuss all the cultural differences, barriers, problems arising out of intercultural diversity, and subsequent breakdown of classroom functionality as mentioned, discussed and noted in all previous activities. They will also be required to come up with possible solutions to make classroom discourse and curriculum more culturally sensitive and relevant, and develop techniques to build trust and communication in classrooms.

2. Part 2 (75 Minutes):

Once the above time period of discussions is over, the teams will be given five minutes to prepare a mini skit or presentation to present their findings and solutions to the entire group. This role-play will further allow the teachers to empathetically put themselves in the students' situation while applying their cross-cultural communication strategies to bypass incidents of cultural miscommunication.

The above culture-general training module that takes a developmental approach to intercultural training will allow the participants to:

- Identify prevailing cultural biases and bias patterns
- Establish cultural subtext and instances of omission and misrepresentation in teaching materials.
- Identify the above problems and effectively redesign lecture plans, and create classroom environments conducive to effective learning and growth.

Further, it will help develop a group of educators possessing the ability to present their views and opinions with enhanced clarity, keeping in mind different cultural needs of students from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

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