

Workshop: „ IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE? NO. IT'S....”

Date, Time: Thursday, 31.03.2011, 10:30 – 12:30

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Workshop content/theme

Key words: cultural identity, communication, intercultural communication, barriers, stereotypes

W. Somerset Maugham wrote: “Men and women are not only themselves; they are also the region in which they were born, the city apartment or the farm in which they learnt to walk, the games they played as children, the tales they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poets they read and the God they believed in”.

This workshop focuses on the issues of cultural identity, the importance of communication and barriers in intercultural communication. It gives the participants a chance to explore their own thoughts, feelings and perceptions about likes, dislikes, stereotypes and how they want to be thought of, talked to and treated. The participants will try to step outside their own cultural perspective and experience the impact of stereotypical comments.

In order to understand one another when people do not share a common cultural experience, „*We should not judge one another until we have walked two moons in his moccasins*“, says a famous Native American proverb.

Aims

- To provide participants with instruments to identify their own cultural profile,
- To raise awareness about differences and about benefits of diversity in particular cultural diversity,
- To tackle concepts such as stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, perception vs. reality, exclusion,
- To help participants identify their own prejudices and think of a way to deal with them,
- To see the impact of different experiences on our behaviour towards others,
- To identify and analyse the reasons and motives for discriminating others.

Method(s)/Approach

In this workshop, the participants tried to examine their (and other people's) cultural identity, the similarities and differences between them, looked at communication from different points of view through games, examined barriers to communication, had fun with differences in perception, tried to answer the questions about what is in certain gestures, took part in a culture quiz and in a role play about stereotypes and prejudices. In the very end, everyone had fun telling nationality jokes.

1. Introduce yourself: A new social network
2. Similarities & differences: Stand up if you...
3. PowerPoint: slide: W.S. Maugham „Razor's Edge“ & the vision of culture (the aspects of identity)
4. PowerPoint: slide: Iceberg model of culture
5. Culture and communication: A ball toss name game
6. Language as a barrier: Indian and cowboy story
7. Slide: The pyramid: language, communicative competence, empathy
8. Differences in perception – guess what?
9. What's in a gesture?
10. A culture quiz
11. Stereotypes – funny maps
12. Stereotypes and prejudices: a role play: the raft
13. Jokes about different nationalities

Further tips, sources, resource material or links

<http://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/>

Impressions, Outcomes of the workshop

In this workshop the participants examined and learnt that teaching and learning a foreign language cannot be reduced only to the teaching of linguistic skills. The contemporary models of communicative competence show that there is much more to learning a language, and they include the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness. Our perceptions (as well as values, opinions and attitudes) have been created throughout our lives. It is a part of programming and a process of adopting the behaviour patterns of the surrounding culture or social group. The way members of one group see and interpret things is quite logically different from other people's perception because they were "programmed" differently. In short, we are born within a culture, and within the first stages of life, we learn our culture. This is called socialization. Each society transfers to its members the value system underlying its culture. One's judgments, evaluations and justifications are influenced strongly by their ethnocentrism. This means that the members of a particular culture believe that their response to the world is the right one, and that their values and ways of living are universal and the correct ones for all people.

On the other hand, people's behaviour, perceptions, values etc. evolve with time. No one is born with them. They have been learnt and can therefore be unlearned. So it is possible for people to change over time. People have the capacity to change and it is also possible to actively work towards becoming more open and comfortable with difference.

The participants examined the ways to get rid of their ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudices, which are major barriers to intercultural communication. The activities were created to help the participants become more aware of themselves and encouraged to be less judgmental. They were also offered opportunities to demonstrate understanding of similarities and differences between their own culture and other cultures. Considering aspects of their own culture as seen through someone else's eyes provides a totally new perspective. What has always been obvious and subconscious may be noticed for the first time.



