

## Intercultural work

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### Aims

The objective of the workshop was to allow participants to acquire greater sensitivity and empathy in dealing with people from other cultures. In addition it aimed to strengthen their competence in dealing with conflicts in intercultural contexts and especially to broaden their repertoire of actions and behaviour in situations subject to conflicts. Furthermore the course aimed to develop awareness of the participants' own cultural imprint and allow them to acquire confidence and clarity in their professional role and self-image in intercultural work. The workshops enabled the participants to acquire and broaden economical, sociological, cultural and psychological background knowledge regarding immigration and integration (dates, facts, contexts, ground-breaking concepts, theories, etc.). Also the participants were to gain more insight into their own positions and patterns of behaviour and to actively criticise them. In addition to encounter and engage in dialogue with people from other cultures with the objective of getting to know immigrants' situations and of learning to balance the foreign and the familiar, to trace processes of (de-)integration and to get to know oneself better in the process. The workshop was also designed to further the exchange of experience and the creation of lasting information and co-operation networks between the participants. Finally, it was aimed to develop and carry out a project during the workshop and to present it in the framework of the workshop and to thus ensure the applicability of the learning to everyday work.

### Target group

The composition of the target group was interdisciplinary and intercultural participants. Persons from many different fields of work - social, youth, health, education, integration, and community - participated. The participants encountered immigrants and multicultural groups within the context of their field of work. The primary goal of the participants was to broaden their intercultural competencies.

### Contents

#### Immigration - multicultural co-existence (Module I)

This seminar deals with immigration and the value and culture shifts connected to it. The participants studied their personal socio-cultural origins by means of their familial histories and put their history in the context of history in general. Through this, the intertwining of family curricula (micro level) and the societal developments and events on the macro level became evident, the issue of "immigration" was related to one's own life circumstances and given an emotional context. In a simulation about immigration it was possible to acquire an understanding of the kinds of difficulties with which people who emigrate to another country and wish to be accepted there are confronted.

In addition, Austria's immigration and integration policy during the last 35 years was examined more closely. Aspects of the topic were researched in small groups and presented to the whole group, and human resources personnel (scientists, politicians, representatives of NGO's, representatives of immigration organisations) were available to answer questions.

### **Diversity, foreignness - intercultural communication (Module II)**

One significant focus of the seminar was the discussion of the origins of prejudices, and the conceptualisation of foreignness and alienation. Through perception and reflection exercises, supported by short film sequences and contextual impulses, the participants became aware of the phenomena of selective perception, self-fulfilling prophecy, the development of prejudices and the possibility of the formation of a concept of alienation. The participants studied, by means of a scheme of analysis for the description of marginalisation mechanisms, examples of discrimination and racism both on the interaction-level in daily life as well as on the structural level. Examples of behaviour exhibiting civil resolve and acting approaches were rehearsed by role-play scenarios.

The second part of the seminar was about the examination of family structures from different cultures and the way in which they clash in a pluralist society.

The topic of Islam was of great importance as perceptions of Islam in our society are heavily imprinted by the idea of Islamic fundamentalism. It was the aim of the discussion in the seminar, to present differentiated information about this religion and to examine the heterogeneous group of Muslims in Austria in more detail.

### **Intercultural conflict management (Module III)**

In this seminar, the topics of intercultural conflict management and intercultural management of conflicts were dealt with in an integrated manner. On the level of methodology/didactics the forum theatre (see description of methods) was used as a model for the dealing with conflicts, with the aim of reflecting one's own and external behaviour in conflicts, simulating possible reactions, broadening one's repertoire of responses and to experience oneself being actively creative in conflicts. The scene work was complemented by theoretical contributions about topics such as "What is an intercultural conflict?", "*The Human-Needs Theory* in connection with conflict resolution" and "Non-Violent Communication". The participants extended the contents of these contributions through exercises and sequences of reflection, so as to implement the insights in the scene work which followed.

The participants were in addition, presented with the practical realisation of these approaches through examples of intercultural conflict mediation in the community (conflict mediation in apartment buildings and housing estates).

### **Intercultural learning - integration (Module IV)**

Intercultural learning presupposes encountering people of different cultural origins. It describes a learning process leading from an ethnocentric world view towards the acceptance and valuing of cultural diversity and presupposes the ability to contemplate one's own cultural and moral precepts from a critical distance and to differentiate cultural perceptions. From this starting-point, the participants reflected upon their own intercultural learning history. Experiences from living or travelling abroad, immigration, encounters and experiences with the co-existence of people of diverse origins were thoroughly examined against this background. Different cultural behaviour could be experienced through everyday examples of "critical incidents", and the meanings behind them scrutinised. This also strengthened intercultural competence.

A multicultural society requires supporting social framework conditions such as legal and social equality of treatment, as well as possibilities of participation for immigrants. These topics were looked at in the second part of the seminar. Contributions by experts

about potential-oriented integration policy as well as examples of integration models implemented in practice in the different fields of the community were presented. Additionally, the participants also presented their completed projects during the workshop.

### **Procedure**

The seminar/workshop lasted from October 2001 to March 2002 and comprised 4 three-day seminar-modules (October, November, January, March). Additionally, the participants developed and realised a project and presented it in the seminar.

### **Target group**

The composition of the target group was interdisciplinary and intercultural participants. Persons from many different fields of work - social, youth, health, education, integration, and community - participated. The participants encountered immigrants and multicultural groups within the context of their field of work. The primary goal of the participants was to broaden their intercultural competencies.

## **Methods**

In the pedagogical design special attention was paid to the linking of different levels and forms of learning, namely to the combination of emotional learning, cognitive learning and reflection upon practical experience. On the other hand, the learning levels; individual, group and community, were linked together and entwined with individual learning, learning in groups (group dynamics) and socio-political learning. This concept is reflected in the methods used.

### **Methods of self-awareness and reflection**

These methods allow the participants to acquire personal experience, to get to know themselves better, to practice empathetic capacity for understanding and to broaden their own choices of action. The repertoire of methods included perception, communication and simulation exercises, imaginary voyages, self-assessment exercises, biographical self-reflection and miscellaneous interaction exercises.

### **Forum theatre**

The forum theatre portrayed intercultural conflict situations scenically. Different methods of resolution were sought and played through. In the scenic play the participants could immediately see the effect of their behaviour and their intervention. The stage became the test for reality. New, unusual and also seemingly absurd patterns of behaviour and action could be tried out. Courage to act was promoted.

### **Intercultural dialogue**

Intercultural dialogue and encounters with people from other cultures allowed the participants to get to know biographies, values and the life situations of people from other cultures; to balance the foreign and the familiar, to trace (de-)integration processes and to experience this for themselves in the encounter.

### **Impulse presentations**

Impulse presentations by experts helped the participants to acquire sociological, cultural, political and economic background knowledge and to grasp the larger social context in the field of immigration and integration and also to become acquainted with ground-breaking concepts. The experts' presentations allowed the participants to argue intellectually in discussions, to present their own opinions, to obtain confirmation or to

be questioned and to take home suggestions for new approaches and concepts to be used in practice.

### **"Good-practice" examples**

Practice field experts presented positive and successful experiences in immigration and integration work. When choosing the examples, the course management was guided by the participants' needs and wishes. This stimulated the communication of interesting and exciting practical approaches and networking.

### **Planning and realisation of a project**

This was an integral part of the course. The participants presented the results of their projects during the fourth module. Cognitive knowledge, behaviour and learned acting strategies could be implemented in a practical area of responsibility. At the same time, the projects also created an impetus for the copying of creative ideas within the seminar group.

### **Best practice**

#### **Family histories in the course of the generations (Description)**

The participants were instructed to research their own social and cultural origins. They were asked in the invitation to the seminar to explore the living circumstances and history of their family back to their grandparents. The most diverse aspects of their family background including such areas as upbringing, education, profession/occupation, male and female roles, religion, language, number of children, marriage, etc. were to be looked at. Additionally they were to put their family history in a historical context. Questions such as: What influence had outside political, economical events? What changes, e.g. referring to the significance of the religion, the roles of man and woman became visible in the course of the three generations? What were their experiences of immigration? Which reasons were decisive?

This gave the participants the possibility to discover the interlacing of family curricula and social events. The participants presented their "histories" to the group in the seminar. Drawings, photos, important objects ("cultural objects") were used to illustrate the events and support the presentation. A concluding collective reflection on the presented stories allowed the creation of mutual relations and insights and the expression of emotional involvement.

#### **Family histories in the course of the generations (Effects and benefits)**

The realisation of one's own family history with its developments, ruptures, contradictions, highs and lows made the participants emotionally involved. For many people it was the first time they had brought to mind and recounted their history in a general survey over three generations. The intensive discussion of family history allowed the participants to immerse themselves in the family's cultural history and identity and gave many people the motivation to delve further into their origins. Exchanging their histories made many participants realise that there are, in their families, examples of immigration within the last 100 years. Causes for immigration then and now include wars, economic distress, aspirations for better opportunities in life, voluntary departure and the desire for adventure. The methodology of the "history-telling" was greatly approved and appreciated. One participant put it this way: "If we, in our own families, told our common history more often, we would act in a less deprecatory way towards immigrants, because we would realise that we too are a part of this history of immigration". An awareness developed as to how much social circumstances influence and mould family life and the personal history of individuals.

#### **"Barnga" - a simulation game about the topic "intercultural communication/integration" (Description)**

The card tournament "Barnga" (description see "service") is an easy to play and time-limited simulation game, which picks out aspects of intercultural communication and integration as a central theme. The players were, in groups of 4-6 persons, placed at several tables. The tables were labelled (Table 1, Table 2 and so on.). On the last table there stood a bowl with fruit, candy etc. With 5 groups the game lasts 4 rounds, with 4 groups 3 rounds and so on. The last table is the winner. Each group receives a set of cards, the rules and the instructions. The rules provide the participants with the information that the one who has the most tricks after 5 minutes is the winner of a "round". The winner of the round moves to the next higher group, the loser falls to the next lower group (except in the first and last group). The instructions contain slightly different "rules" from table to table. But the players are not provided with this information. After a five-minute try-out phase the card tournament begins. The groups are told that they are no longer allowed to communicate verbally or in writing. Afterwards the game is evaluated at three different levels, firstly, on the emotional level: Which emotions did you go through? What were the strongest experiences of frustration or success? Which behaviour brought you success or failure? On the cognitive level: What consequences became evident? What does it mean not to understand "rules"? How does one feel belonging to the core group? How does one feel as a newcomer? Finally on the political level: How is this game connected to "immigration", "intercultural communication", "intercultural coexistence"? What does the game illustrate about distribution of power, marginalisation, security, solidarity and participation? How can integration and multiculturalism work against this backdrop?

### **"Barnga" - a simulation game about the topic "intercultural communication/integration" (Effects and benefits)**

The slightly different rules between the groups led to irritation during player changes. In particular, newcomers (immigrants) get to feel the handicap of not having known the rules. How does one behave in relation to these irritations? How does the core group behave - with solidarity or by marginalising? Are the rules of the core group maintained? Are new rules developed? Reactions of the players are very diverse. Withdrawal, fight, silent adaptation, protest/dispute, escape - a variety of behaviours are visible. The fact that speech is forbidden, leads to the newcomers not being introduced sufficiently to the new rules. From this arise not only misunderstandings regarding the rules but also subtle tendencies for plotting within the core group. The question arises whether to surmount the communication barriers or to use knowledge of the rules as a means of power. The game reflects the social reality about "intercultural communication" and "integration of immigrants" very well. The participants are confronted with similar difficulties as people who want to be accepted into a new society or group. The members of the last group know in advance that the game does not allow them to end up as the overall winner. Because of this, the motivation of those involved to play decreases round by round. As playing behaviour is successively questioned, the willingness to integrate diminishes.

### **Integrative approach in the intercultural handling of conflicts (Description)**

On the level of methodology/didactics, forum theatre (see description of methods) was used as a model for the action-related handling of intercultural conflicts. The basic principle of forum theatre is to draw attention to, by means of theatre, situations in which repressive action occurs, and to directly alter these situations. Conflicts and situations of injustice are portrayed and resolution approaches are developed in scenes. The participants are asked, in the role of "the victim", to show diverse possible solutions. The stage became the test for reality.

The scenes were stories based on every-day experiences about discrimination and marginalisation (e.g. racist molestation of Muslims in the tramway). The objective of the scene work is to reflect the behaviour of oneself and others in conflicts, act out variants

of actions, broaden ones repertoire of actions and experience oneself being actively creative in a conflict.

The scene work - three to four scenes were worked on in the seminar - was constantly deepened and extended through theoretical input.

Topics such as conflict theories, cultural theories and cultural concepts, identity-needs in deeply rooted conflicts, 'what is an intercultural conflict?' and inoffensive anger-communication were consolidated through impulse presentations.

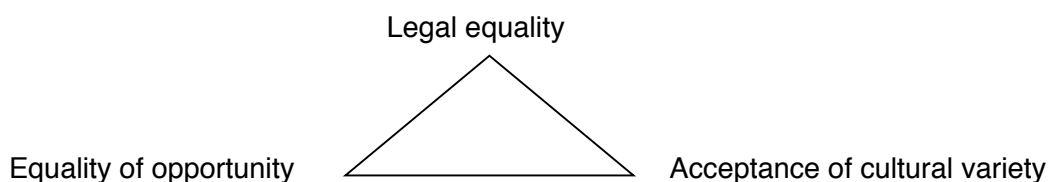
Exercises and sequences of reflection allowed the participants to adopt aspects of these impulses in practice, so as to apply them the following scene work.

### **Integrative approach in the intercultural handling of conflicts (Effects and benefits)**

This integrative method of conflict handling was highly appreciated by the participants. The transfer of theoretical parts into strategies for behaviour and actions can be implemented immediately. The participants experienced a palette of variants of actions in one and the same conflict situation. The one-dimensional assessment of conflict-solving strategies gave way to a multi-dimensional perspective. The learning through dialogue between theory and exercise impulses on the one hand and the forum theatre work on the other allowed a study of various facets of conflict and conflict resolution work. Both a broadening of the behaviour repertoire, as well as a deepening of understanding of, and recognition of conflicts occurred. Forum theatre allows for a highly emotional participation in conflict resolution. Actors as well as audience are "grabbed" emotionally by the scene work. Additionally, theory inputs strongly emphasises the cognitive understanding and acquisition. Well orchestrated, the two elements resulted in integrated learning.

### **The integration triangle (Description)**

In discussions of the topic "integration", it was noticed on many occasions that this term was discussed in contradictory ways, and that it contained or suggested different meanings and connotations to the participants. For many, it refers to the menace of forced assimilation and conformity of immigrants, for others "integration" meant the participation in political rights. Because of the explosiveness and ambivalence of this term in the socio-political debate, ample space was given for the discussion of this topic. The course management thought it important to take a closer look at this term and to present their own analysis framework. The Austrian political scientist Dr. Bernhard Perchinig presented and explained the following analysis framework.



#### *Assessment criteria for legal equality (political level):*

- Do foreign nationals experience equality in the face of the law?
- How about the degree of residence security?
- How is family reunification regulated?
- What degree of access to the work and housing market, educational system and welfare-state benefits is available according to legal status?
- What opportunities for political participation do foreign nationals legally have? Do foreign nationals have the right to vote?
- What are the provisions for naturalisation?

*Assessment criteria for equal opportunities on socio-economical and political levels*

- What is the real residence security for immigrants like?
- How about the opportunities for immigrants in the job market, in the educational system, as well as in the housing market and goods market?
- What real possibilities for political participation (right to vote and participation in voting, status of immigrants in political parties and unions, ratio of deputies and members of government to the immigrant population) do immigrants have?
- What action does the state take to fight discrimination?

*Assessment criteria for cultural variety or diversity (socio-cultural level)*

- Is multilingualism and intra-cultural instruction in kindergarten and educational institutions part of the rule-system?
- Is there any official recognition of the holidays of the immigrants' religions?
- Are religious food commandments recognised and acted upon in kindergarten, schools, hospitals and staff canteens?
- Do administrative bodies offer their services multilingually?
- Do social institutions offer culture-sensitive support?

Integration policy must not confine itself to one or two areas but should pay adequate attention to all three aspects.

**The integration triangle (Effects and benefits)**

The participants received an easy to handle but very significant instrument to systematise daily experiences in immigration work. This scheme affords them an orientation for political discussions. The analysing scheme affords a new view on phased-out aspects. Ideas and approaches for "integration" become visible - e.g. the idea of an intra-enterprise interpretation service was viewed as a very motivating and sensible idea by a participant from the health sector. The presented instrument permits a very comprehensive view of integration. It eliminates many insecurities and ambivalent and contradictory notions. The participants appreciated it as an important support in their daily work, in which they are repeatedly challenged to define integration and to take measures. Many of the presented aspects appeared to the participants as utopian. However, some aspects seemed difficult but possible to obtain (e.g. multilingual administrative services). The question of how to fund these claims and demands came to the foreground.

**Participants' feedback**

*"For me the variety of the participants, the different professional experiences, the interculturally-composed group was one of the most important elements of this course and a big enrichment. I really learned a lot through this course, especially concerning my attitude towards Austrians."*

*"You should emphasise even more that the course also runs on an emotional level. I had the expectation that it would be a course with presentations. This caused me some difficulties in the beginning, but during the course I started to appreciate these methods."*

*"Sensibility, curiosity, openness, small indications of success, contacts with the other participants, new and expanded knowledge - all this I gained through this workshop and it all flows into my daily work. The workshop was enriching in every respect."*

*"For me the four most important elements of this workshop were:*

enhancing cultural awareness through cultural production

- *the introduction with one's own history of origin,*
- *the insights concerning the unjust "ratio of distribution" between foreign nationals and Austrians regarding possibilities in education, career and job,*
- *the significance of the non-intellectual accesses and methods in the course methodology,*
- *the method of the forum theatre and interesting debate about Islam."*

*"In some stages less would have been 'more', i.e. in a further course several aspects should be allocated more time and space - be it for more in-depth theory-impulses or for more examination and discussion within the group."*

*"Forum theatre is an impressive way of communicating and method of conflict handling. I also discovered that I like to slip into roles and act, something I did not know beforehand. Now at the end of the course I feel more competent and definitely assured."*

*"Foreign is a way of looking at things. For a native I am foreign. For an alien we are all foreign."*

*"The best way for me to describe the seminars is the following:*

- *the first course was the "seminar of the community"*
- *the second course the "seminar of the broadening (of one's horizon and self-awareness)"*
- *the third course the "seminar of politics"*
- *the fourth course the "seminar of knowledge".*

## **Evaluation**

The goals of this workshop were achieved to a high degree. It should be noted that the courses pedagogic/didactic conception, with the combination of emotional, cognitive learning and reflection upon practice, may appear novel and unfamiliar to the participants. Participants have different learning experiences and learning habits and self-awareness includes the questioning of long standing thought and behaviour patterns, so the education approach realised in the seminar can thus cause insecurity. The integrative concept of learning poses high demands on the seminar's trainers and assistants. It means constant balancing of the elements of self-awareness, knowledge-broadening and information and strategy transfers in relation to the groups. Disagreements during the course are unavoidable, because the groups represent the variety in plural societies; a microcosm of society, so to speak. Participants have different demands and priorities, such as more political learning, more self-awareness, more practice. Those have to be brought in line with each other. This means re-discussing and re-planning aspects of the content, lecturers and other areas in the framework setting the priorities for the seminars to be repeated. The course management considers the learning structure with the meshing of emotional and cognitive learning, the combination of individual and group learning as especially valuable. It allows the participants to put what they have learned into practice particularly well and to contribute new questions from practice to the course.

## **Service**

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