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September 2005 in Jena (Certificate to Become an Intercultural Trainer/Coach) and Nice (SIETAR Europa Congress)

Margit Krause-Ono

イェーナとニース 2005 年 9 月 ～異文化トレーナ・コーチの資格と SIETAR ヨーロッパ会議～

マルギット　クラウゼ=小野

Introduction and Background

Anyone not living in their own home-surrounding is vitally interested in intercultural relations.

Teaching Master-students at the Muroran Institute of Technology showed me their real need for more awareness-raising intercultural input. After 2-3 years of autodidactic learning while teaching by trial and error, I came across a feasible one-year online-course in Intercultural Studies from a well-known German university. Friedrich-Schiller-University (FSU) in Jena offered a 'certificate to become an intercultural trainer/coach', starting at the beginning of September with a 9-day-attendance-program at their Jena campus.

Another relevant source for intercultural matters is SIETAR (Society for Intercultural Education Training And Research), which I had come across about 4 years ago. This year (2005) I became a member of SIETAR Japan and attended their yearly congress in Tokyo in June, giving me a little insight into the professional and academic activities in intercultural studies in Japan.

I immediately felt that the SIETAR Europa Congress in Nice at the end of September would provide even more input, broadening my horizons and perspectives. Attendance would be especially valuable after attending the first part of the studies for the certificate in Jena.

September 2005 in Jena **Margit Krause-Ono**
(Certificate to Become an Intercultural Trainer/Coach)
and Nice(SIETAR Europa Congress)

Thanks to funding from Muroran IT, I was able to attend both above mentioned events in September. It was also possible to spend several days looking for German and Culture-studies in Germany for the students of Muroran IT.

JENA

I am convinced that the certificate to become an intercultural trainer/coach will give me enough theoretical knowledge, as well as practical know-how and tools, to teach and instruct our students here. Both 4-year-students and graduate students can widely profit from my 'silent language' class, as it prepares and equips them for work. Culture is 'the software of the mind' as one famous researcher put it, or simply 'the way we do things around here' as someone else said. And because everyday-culture is so automatic and routine, nobody usually bothers about it. Certainly few are able to talk about it or explain it (therefore silent language), but people are sometimes extremely cross when their unspoken and often also unconscious rules are broken.

Everyone present at the first attendance-phase of the certificate studies seemed to be aware of the above. The program, starting Saturday, September 03 and ending Sunday, September 11, contained a very rich and dense experience. Studies lasted each day from 9:00 to 17:30, plus four evenings with special guests from academia and business.

The following paragraph I will write in present tense as we are still learning together and will meet again for the final exam by September next year.

The participants, altogether about 60, are mostly Germans of varying ages averaging around 35-40 years old. Most of them have lived in one or more foreign countries, are presently living abroad like me, or are planning to be expatriates. Some come from academia, some have their own consulting or training business, some were sent by their companies and some come out of pure interest in the matter. But one connecting point is visible: everybody wants to learn more in detail about the theoretical part of intercultural communication, as well as to learn more practical approaches and tools. Most important – everybody wants to know how the two are connected in order to be more competent in giving appropriate training and coaching.

The first two days workshops on different countries were offered, of which I chose India. The presenter, Jasmin Mahadevan, was a very competent young bicultural woman (Indian-German) who works for a first-rate IT-company setting up the cultural organization of their site in India. In two days she managed to get across the basic necessary insights into Indian history, culture (or better cultures, as India is very diverse), values and life. She enabled us to get at least a feeling of what goes and what does not in India. The second day we spent more time on simulation games in order to try out what we had learned. Our presenter simulated different Indian roles and was our sparring partner. This workshop was an eye-opener, showing me the important differences and

similarities between India and Japan.

At the end of the 9-day-attendance-program the same presenter also gave a workshop on Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, countries she had studied and briefly lived in (she has a background as an ethnologist). As I knew she was very competent, I attended this two-day-workshop also. It proved to be as fruitful as the first one and will help me in better understanding and interacting with those of our foreign students who come from these countries. Studies on China and its culture will be in the online-part of the certificate which I intend to take too.

The other days were filled with introduction into e-learning and blended-learning as we are going to study on a metacoon-platform, which is loaded with different tasks, modules, video-lectures, learning-journals, feedback tools, bibliographies and so forth. We also had to undergo an intercultural assessment showing us where we are now, and at the end of the online-course we will repeat it in order to get feedback on the change we are, hopefully, undergoing this year. Another important part was the class on methods of intercultural trainings, giving us some ideas on how to divide the different training techniques and, more precisely, for what purpose and under what circumstances to use them. This is very important as books on training techniques are usually lacking adequate advice on how to classify them, assuming that the reader is well-versed in communication theory.

Special presentations

The special presentations in the evenings were quite diverse, but very enlightening, and of course connected with intercultural communication. All of the presentations or talks were followed by discussions, which were sometimes quite controversial.

The first talk was given by Stefanie Potsch-Ringeisen, professor at the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt in Southern Germany. This is a small but excellent university, which in some parts is quite linked to big companies. She gave a presentation about mediation in China, which, for the Chinese part, often works much better than intercultural training, provided it is done by a Chinese in the Chinese way and meaning of mediation. Here again was an eye-opener and reminder on how important it is to look not only for related but slightly different methods, but also to make sure the definition or concept of a word, which seems to be understood by everybody, is really the same for all.

The next presentation was given by Professor Juergen Bolten, initiator of the program on Intercultural Business Communication and in charge of the intercultural online-course at Jena University and his student Franziska Quaas, who had just finished her doctorate. Their subject was: ‘Germany seen from the outside’. One part of the presentation dealt with impressions of Germany foreigners living in or visiting Berlin have. This part not only revealed the expected stereotypes, but also gave Germans fresh insight into pictures

or aspects of Germany they themselves usually do not think about. The second part of the presentation dealt with stereotypes other European countries have about Germany. Professor Bolten examined the top ten stereotypes of Germany from more than 20 countries and found out that 56% of them were the same in all the countries. He also found, that even in a time-span of ten years not many stereotypes change. Another disconcerting fact about stereotypes is, that even a stay in a foreign country can reinforce existing stereotypes if the stay is less than a year. Most dangerous are stays of about six months. Only stays of more than two years bring about a more differentiated view of the country the foreigner stays in.

The last two presentations were given by business people. The first talk was given by Dr. Sieber of DaimlerChrysler introducing measures in his company to tackle intercultural problems. Although the headquarters of DaimlerChrysler is in Sindelfingen in Southern Germany, the company itself is a global player producing different types of vehicles worldwide. Its aim now is to put more and more local employees into leading positions. It is therefore important that those employees get to know how and why the headquarters acts. In order to achieve this, designated local leaders are invited to the headquarters and live with their families in Germany for a year or two. During that time their children go to German schools or kindergartens, their spouses learn German and interact with their surroundings and the employees work at the headquarters in a rather responsible position, while they also learn German. The whole family is involved in this intercultural training program. The program itself was set up in the last two-three years, mostly for Indian employees. One of the participants of the certificate study was rather dissatisfied with DaimlerChrysler having only this one program while her own company, Bosch-Rexrodt, which also holds a plant in Tsuchiura, Japan, has already established several programs, all also under the premise that the foreign employees, mostly engineers, have to learn German.

The last presenter, Heinrich Zimmermann, is a consultant to various companies as well as to different ministries of trade in Germany (on county and national level). He explained the different institutions which support German foreign trade as well as their networks in foreign countries. This was a rather overwhelming presentation in the sense that often the different institutions do not really work together. Additionally intercultural training, especially for small and middle-sized companies is still very much lacking and many mistakes in their endeavors to establish themselves in foreign markets could be prevented.

The online part of the certificate

The above was a summary of the first attendance-phase of the certificate. Now, until the end of July 2006, online-learning and studying is required. There are further aspects to

cover and modules to study, as well as credits to earn by studying the Basics of Intercultural Business Communication with lectures, different exercises, and reports to write. Then follows another seminar on a different country and its culture, for which I will focus on China. Number 3 is the Theory of Intercultural Communication, a subject to which I am really looking forward. Number 4 will be to explain and to describe various cultures. The last big block is didactics and the concept of intercultural trainings. For this last part I should develop a concept of intercultural training of Japanese students, as this is my actual situation. It could also be done for Japanese teachers or employees.

Next September the second attendance-phase of the certificate will again be on the campus in Jena. Then all of us have to participate in intercultural negotiation training, a rather realistic simulation of negotiations between companies from different cultures. This will be done for 2-3 days. Further workshops on different countries are also offered and a seminar on a special theme (this year it was evaluation) has to be attended. Last, but not least, a final exam has to be taken. In conjunction my own proposal of a concept for intercultural training has to be presented and defended.

Study tour to Germany

During my time in Jena, and also afterward, I got in contact with people in charge of language centers at different universities. I first tried to contact Dr. Biechele in Jena itself, where I only met his colleague Dr. Barkowski, who nevertheless assured me that study tours for Japanese students would be possible and could be organized. Next I met Dr. Kirchmeyer, who is in charge of the language center at the Bauhaus-University in Weimar. She too, was very positive and made different proposals regarding a two-week stay of Japanese students in March. Then I contacted Mrs. Kitlinski, responsible for language programs at the University of Halle, whose campus is in Wittenberg, the town of Martin Luther.

Recently I received more detailed proposals from all three of them. For the moment, the proposal of Dr. Kirchmeyer looks best, program-wise as well as price-wise. On the further outcome I will report later.

Sietar Europa Congress in Nice

Leila Buck

I should mention that I attended a pre-conference one-day workshop given by Leila Buck, a bicultural artist and facilitator (daughter of an American diplomat father and a Lebanese mother). Originally I wanted to attend a different workshop on intercultural training techniques, but it was cancelled while I was already in Germany and I had no way to know it. However, I did not regret the change. Leila's workshop was called: Tools of Engagement: Drama for Cross-Cultural Education. The content was, in fact, also about training techniques or as Leila put it herself:"At the heart of each culture and person is lived

experience. The ability to share in that experience is central to successful cross-cultural dialogue and conflict resolution. Drama is the only medium that truly allows one to step into another's experience, to "walk a mile in their shoes". It would be too long to go in all the details, but I can say that tools have really been passed into my hands. For anyone who is interested in it, I have a 7-page-report on the workshop written by Leila and sent to all the participants. She also gave a one-hour, one-woman, performance the same evening for all the congress participants about her very diverse intercultural life and experiences. The performance was so good and eye-opening that I urged her to make a video of it. Parts of it would even be worthwhile for our students here.

About the Congress

It was in part a very intriguing congress with close to 400 participants from many countries, not only European ones. A French resort village with excellent facilities was chosen to gather participants together at the same time and place, especially at meals. It provided an excellent opportunity to get to know very different people. It was a very diverse group with people from education, business, employees, managers, and owners. As a whole, the presentations at the congress seemed to reflect like a mirror our actual global situation:

On one hand there was criticism towards intercultural models, which are mostly of Anglo-Saxon, or at least Western, origin. It was questioned if they are really adaptable to all other cultures. This criticism was reflected on during workshops and presentations about trust, reciprocity, critical thinking versus - or and - value education and so forth. On the other hand, there were a number of presentations which precisely introduced cultural models or methods which seemed to be adaptable to whatever culture, like for example the ‘cultural detective’.

Presentations by participants from the new EU-member countries showed clearly how much they are in need of intercultural studies. Many companies sometimes considerably invest in these countries, but coaching/training- programs seem to be lacking even among the big companies. There is still an extraordinary ignorance of very necessary soft skills, which in the end could very well jeopardize the whole project, as numerous examples have shown in the past.

As the West has become more and more aware of China and India, also at the congress quite a number of presentations or workshops dealt with India or Indian culture, surprisingly there were hardly any on China. However, presentations and lectures on Islam and Arab culture (how to avoid pitfalls in business negotiations as well as ‘being a Moslem in a secular world’) could be found on the agenda.

In a very crowded room, which demonstrated the high interest of the participants, Professor Bernard Saint-Jacques from the University of British Columbia and Shukutoku

Daigaku gave a presentation on: 'The New Japanese Society: A model of Successful Cultural Conflict Resolution'. He stipulated a changing mentality in Japan, shifting more and more towards individualism and that therefore Japanese are becoming more outspoken. Although he presented data in support, it is only a thesis which I dare to question. He did acknowledge that the numbers might be true mostly for Kanto and Kansai with their big centers of Tokyo and Osaka. The city of Osaka has always been much more boisterous than other cities in Japan.

Last, but not least, there were also a small number of presentations urging us to go back to the roots of intercultural studies/relations, which nowadays are often confounded with international relations. An important presentation on this was given by Dr. Milton Bennett, one of the founders of SIIC (Summer Institute of Intercultural Communication) in Portland, which was the first and remains one of the best intercultural training institutes in the USA. Intercultural relations are, apart from linguistics, the only discipline which really analyzes intercultural interaction. Only from this basis arises the ability to give information about an ongoing relationship. Dr. Bennett urged us to beware of categorizing people by their national or group culture, to beware of all sorts of stereotypes and to beware of psychologizing any acts, personalities or character traits. The only revealing method is to go back to the interaction itself and look what happens, e.g. analyze it.

After the presentation Dr. Bennett agreed to an interview which I taped on video camera. I mainly asked him what he would suggest I should do with students at our institution. His answers were clear and mostly indicated points which I had already introduced or approached myself: intercultural awareness training and simulation or role games, and always having an eye on the necessity to adjust training materials to the Japanese context and to the Japanese learning style.

Conclusion

The attendance program of the certificate in Jena and the SIETAR Europa Congress in Nice were both very stimulating and rewarding experiences. They showed me the whole spectrum of the subject, and also the necessity to find my own exact position in it. As a conclusion there might be a difference between what I teach my students and on exactly what I am doing research. In any case I do not want this research to be only theoretical but to be also fruitful to the practitioner. For now I am only eager to start my online studies and to give a good performance next year September in Jena, when I have to present my concept of a training session of Japanese students and sit my final exam.

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