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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING RESPECTFUL OF LEARNERS' CHARACTERISTICS: A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL FOR SOCIAL PROMOTION OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, EXPERTISE AND SKILLS

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Abstract

The escalating immigrant presence in Europe highlights certain issues of diversity in terms of language, para-language, religion, territoriality, class, and ethnicity. The reality today more than ever is that 'most, if not all nation States are differentiated polyethnic States...' (Gundara 2000: 24). This calls for the strengthening of intercultural communication competencies and skills in particular within institutions that are professionally in contact with mobility. This paper presents a training methodology for intercultural communication training, developed within the framework of lifelong learning, Grundtvig 1.1. This paper also proposes that in order for such training to be successful one needs to respect participants' different pathways that "work within each of us to create a system of learning based upon stimulus processing, the use of memory, and the pattern-driven ingenuity of our human capacity to respond" to the learning experience (Grundtvig Let Me Learn Training Module 2005).

Key words: Intercultural communication training, Learning Patterns, Let Me Learn, SPICES, differentiation, Conducive Learning Environment.

The escalating immigrant presence in Europe highlights certain issues of diversity in terms of language, para-language, religion, territoriality, class, ethnicity and race. The reality today more than ever is that 'most, if not all nation States are differentiated polyethnic States...' (Gundara 2000: 24). While this reality, one can argue, has always been an integral part of most European historical reality, most Europeans, and in particular Mediterranean countries, are experiencing a 'new' immigration phenomenon. The new wave of immigrants from Africa, sometimes referred to as the 'boat people' that cross the sea from the shores of Africa to find a better life in the perceived more affluent countries of Europe, has implanted a new wave of racial awareness which often resulted in racism both at the level of popular talk – man in the street chatter – and of the pseudo-philosophical and I dare say the pseudo-political discourse, which often result in social and economic policies of a neo-liberal orientation (Fridell 2008).

This paper will not attempt to engage in a discussion of the political and moral dilemmas that such a complex phenomenon raises. This paper takes an a-priori political stance that multiculturalism has strengthened or is in fact strengthening the cultural life of Europe. The recognition of the enrichment that different cultures bring to a specific society needs to be celebrated and embedded in the life of the people that make up that society. Such recognition of diversity needs to be a complex appreciation of the concept, because diversity is not only between the dominant society and the minorities, but also diversity between the different minorities in a specific nation. It is therefore believed that this principle needs to be entrenched in the whole of the educational system that values diversity.

This principle was transferred to an agenda of intercultural training, a lifelong learning programme within the Socrates/Grundtvig projects – SPICES (Social Promotion of Intercultural Communication Expertise and Skills). This training programme has built a specific pedagogical model that responds to the diversity of learners' learning profiles and methodology. Such a model would help in a paradigm shift from a negative analysis of the realities such as xenophobia to a more positive, solution-oriented discussion of the issue, namely possibilities for enhanced communication, leading to better understanding and appreciation of behaviours and intercultural differences. Such understanding "ultimately promotes clearer communication, breaks down barriers, builds trust, strengthens relationships, opens horizons and yields tangible results..." (Kwintessential 2009).

This paper presents the work developed within the framework of lifelong learning, Grundtvig 1.1, a project that involved seven partners who came from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Malta. The objective of this project was to illustrate a method in which persons-professionally-in-contact-with-mobility such as intercultural communication trainers, language educators, communication facilitators, intercultural mediators, may use to create training/learning packs for their trainees to acquire intercultural communication skills and/or a second language as language of the context (Klein et al 2007:13-14). The second target group are the adults-in-mobility (for work, study, tourism, immigration etc).

The products of this project are based on two fundamental understandings. The first is the recognition of interculturalism, namely the fact that societies are made of groups that are involved in continuous discussion and willing to be subject to mutual influence. In the words of Balboni (2002), "in the intercultural society the enrichment is philosophical: one discovers other points of view, other ways of conceptualizing reality, other styles of life" (p. 210-211). The second is the recognition of diversity of learners and thus the need of a pedagogical model that addresses these differences within a community of learners, thus providing an environment that is conducive to learning and in which participants learn in full respect of each other's learning modalities.

Interculturalism

This project departed from the recognition of interculturalism as a positive reality that is enriching the 21st century societies across Europe and beyond. At the same time the project partners were aware of the challenges that this reality brings to the communication efforts that citizens of these nations encounter in their attempt to dialogue. These challenges can create ‘the other’ within a society that in principle is trying to go beyond tolerance and create an interrelationship between different cultures present in any one society. It is therefore crucial to create means of intercultural communication that recognizes and values as equal different styles of communication, without imposing any one mode of communication on another. Thus, according to the definition developed within this partnership, intercultural communication (ICC) “is a way or a style of communicating between people who refer to different cultural backgrounds” (Klein et al. 2007: 15).

Thus the project redefines intercultural communication as a process of communication that involves a complex interaction of a range of communication vehicles that involve verbal (language), paraverbal (voice), non-verbal (body) and visual (colours, forms). These gave this partnership the foundations of the methodology that moves away from the traditional, artificially generated, verbal language-based learning scenarios to the creation of materials that are extracted from the context. These materials are not necessarily written texts but also verbal interactions originating from multiple institutional contexts where ‘adults in mobility’ and ‘adults professionally in contact with mobility’ interact. These settings present a challenge to communication between the person professionally in contact with mobility and the person who is in mobility seeking to communicate a need (see figure 1 and figure 2). Written and spoken materials from such contexts constitute prototypical training material through which trainees will be given exposure to, encouraging them to analyse, reflect and react to such materials. Various media are used to help participants to ‘re-live’ the situation (video recording, textual analysis, decoding of non-verbal and paraverbal behaviours). These contextual resources are accompanied with a number of tools that can be used by trainers and trainees to help them through the process of selecting and analysing written, spoken and visual texts (see Figure 3).

Annex A

Primary Health Care Dept.
7, Harper Lane Floriana VLT 14
Tel 21239993, FAX 21222856

Health Centre.....

Patient Treatment Check-List

Date: _____ E111 presented: YES / NO

Name and Surname _____ Date of Birth _____

Passport/I.D No _____ Nationality _____

Temporary Address in Malta _____

Permanent Address Abroad _____

Name and Address of Insurance Company (where available) _____

Treatment given:

MEDICAL	NURSING	OTHER (SPECIFY)
Consultation <input type="checkbox"/>	Change of dressing <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>
Blood Investigations <input type="checkbox"/>	Bandage <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>
CPR <input type="checkbox"/>	Urinalysis <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>
Sutures <input type="checkbox"/>	Nebuliser <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>
X-Ray <input type="checkbox"/>	Foreign body <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ <input type="checkbox"/>
ECG <input type="checkbox"/>		_____ <input type="checkbox"/>

Signature & Name in Blocks
(Staff filling patient's particulars)

Signature & Name in Blocks
(Staff filling treatment given)

Signature and Name in Blocks
(Of patient WITHOUT E111 Form/Card)

Tel. no. _____
(Temporary address in Malta)

Privacy Policy, Ministry of Health, Department of Primary Health Care: In virtue of the Data Protection Act, 2001, please note that the information being requested is necessary for reasons of primary health care and/or administration purposes; it is strictly for use by the Ministry of Health, and shall not be shared with other organisations. You have the right to access your personal data and to have it updated. Any communications are to be addressed to the Primary Health Care Dept. Data Controller, e-mail: mario.a.yella@gov.mt or the postal address, 7, Harper Lane, Floriana VLT 14.

Figure 1. Written communication – A resource from the Maltese context

1.3. Collection and analysis of materials

d-1. Basic materials for the realisation of a prototype of learning-pack for Adults in Mobility

e-1. Basic materials for the realisation of a prototype of learning-pack for Adults professionally in Contact with Mobility

Transcript of a Doctor – Patient interaction

Dr Ehm, why would you like to see me?
 patient Eh I came because, eehm. (4 secs pause) I went to, apparently yes, eh I'm pregnant, I did the test, and the first one came negative but now the second came positive. so I'd like to know first of all where to go to check it, and see ehm how much, and how long I've been like this and also because I have the cough, I don't want to take anything
 Dr I see. Ehm Are you living in Malta, so
 Patient Yes, yes
 Dr Do you have residency?
 Patient No, no not yet
 Dr Not yet, ok. Ehm the first thing, let me just ehm, when was your last period?
 Patient I don't know
 Dr You don't know, you're not quite sure
 Patient No
 Dr And, and were you using any form of contraception?
 Patient No
 Dr No
 Patient Eh, yes, half, half, one moment yes, one mom
 Dr Ok, that's it, ok. Ehm, but you suspected because you didn't see your period for a while
 Patient hm, exactly
 Dr and and then you decided to do a test, you told me the first one was negative and second one was positive
 Patient Nodding Hmm
 Dr OK So it is most probable that you are pregnant
 Patient Nodding ehehm
 Dr Ehm Eh and you have a sore throat? You were telling me
 Patient A cough
 Dr A cough
 Patient But not really during the day, when I go to bed,
 Dr When you go to bed
 Patient Or (pause) or in the evening I get, when I lie down
 Dr When you lie down, you start coughing a bit

Figure 2. Transcript of a Doctor – Patient interaction

Conversation analysis of interactions (1)

(by Gabriella B. Klein)

Cf. Actions 18 - 20, 22 - 23

Request for an identity card

A foreign male citizen resident in an Italian city goes to the office for public relations at the local council to ask for an identity card; the civil servant explains what documents he needs before being able to receive an ID Card

Person(s) who recorded the interaction
Koffi M. Dossou, Veronika M. Wiederin

Person(s) who transcribed the text
Gabriella B. Klein, Veronika M. Wiederin

Place (institution) of the interaction
at the Local Council in a larger Italian city

Date, time and duration of recording
April 2006, afternoon
2:23 minutes

Interactants

PSEUDONYM	CODES	EXPLANATION
adult-in-mobility: AM a foreign citizen, male, speaking very good Italian	AMM	M = male
adult-in-contact-with-mobility: ACM a clerk of the local council, female	ACMF	F = female

1 AMM buonasera

2 ACMF buonasera

3 AMM signora mi serviva hm far la carta di identità che devo

4 fare/

5 ACMF lei ha la residenza nel comune di perugia/

6 AMM sì

7 ACMF quindi deve produrre * il permesso di soggiorno o la carta

8 di soggiorno insieme al suo passaporto

9 AMM (hm) * mi ci vuole del tempo per avere/

10 ACMF dopo l'iscrizione anagrafica le occorrerà circa un mese (e

11 m') un mese circa deve venire il vigile a verificare la sua

12 residenza * dopodiché ci porta la risposta * e

13 immediatamente la trascriviamo all'anagrafe * poco dopo può

14 fare la carta di identità

15 AMM va bene grazie

16 ACMF prego

Tool 20

Actions 18 - 20,
22 - 23

We may note here the phenomenon of repair through reformulation and elaboration (lines 11-13; cf. highlighted sequence).

The operators of public services are generally conscious about the fact that the bureaucratic-institutional terms (*iscrizione anagrafica*, line 10) is not easy to understand, especially by foreigners, and therefore even without checking if the adult-in-mobility understands or not, operate immediately a repair through reformulation and elaboration (lines 11-13).

Figure 3. A snapshot of a tool used in the handbook for Conversation Analysis of Interactions

A Pedagogical Model that respects diversity

The guidelines therefore suggest the following underlying principle that sustains the methodology that is suggested here. The principle is that all materials used should respect each learner's context and modality of learning. The three elements that make up this principle are:

- Respect and appreciation of the experience that the trainee brings to the training and in view of the curriculum that is being covered. Thus acquaintance with the prior knowledge that each trainee comes with is crucial in the designing and planning stages of any training programme. Such experience can be attained through prior assessment of the competences and knowledge of the trainee cohort.
- Connecting with the interests of the learner can be yet another crucial ingredient in accessing the learners' will to learn and thus respecting the context from which the learner hails. These interests could serve as anchoring thought processes on which to build new understanding and new learning (Csikszentmihalyi 1997).
- Finally, an important element to consider, and which should help us accurately personalize our training, is precise knowledge of the processing preferences of each person who is involved in the training being organized (Johnston 1996, 1998; Sternberg, Torff and Grigorenko 1998). Simply using strategies indiscriminately, without knowledge of the processing characteristics of the learners for which the strategies are intended, would do little good. Each learner, as we will explain further on in this paper, brings to the learning environment a personalized combination of learning patterns that would impinge on the learning and teaching climate and the relationship of the people within it.

These three elements would give the trainer the information required to modify the content and/or the process through which the trainee will be able to access the learning outcomes. This information will also make possible for the trainer to suggest different products or responses that the trainee is expected to yield by the end of the activity. Finally knowledge of these elements will help the trainer negotiate the learning environment and group the trainees into effective and efficient learning teams.

Through these accommodations and considerations the trainer will be facilitating learning thus creating an environment that is conducive to learning. For this end the training programme suggests a number of methods that can be used, amongst which one can mention interactive methods (moderation method, brainstorming, life story approach, cooperative and task-based learning, role-playing, problem-solving and self- and other-observation of the communicative

behaviour) and deductive approaches, which might be more appropriate when the objective is to inform.

The choice of methods can also be affected, (in my opinion should be affected) by the profile of the participating cohort. Brain research (Bruer 1997) has indicated pathways which might differ from one learner to another, which “work within each of us to create a system of learning based upon stimulus processing, the use of memory, and the pattern-driven ingenuity of our human capacity to respond” (Grundtvig Let Me Learn Training Module: 2005).

A successful programme is one that is respectful of the different learners’ pathways for taking in the world and making sense of it. Learners need to make sense of the world in order to understand and learn. It is common knowledge that all learners have personalized means for doing so. Why? Johnston (1994, 2002, 2006, 2009) explains this phenomenon through a simple representation explaining how four interactive learning patterns of ‘sequence’, ‘precision’, ‘technical reasoning’ and ‘confluence’ interact to form distinct combinations which govern how each learner takes in and interprets the world. These patterns act as channelling filters of sensory stimuli. According to this representation the learning journey begins with the senses that serve as the first line receptors that initiate learning. It is they who gather and channel stimulus into the brain that in turn channels it through its complex series of regions and its neuron-circuitry. Within the brain’s electro-chemical processing, the stimulus is “handled” by a number of operations ultimately coming to a point where it meets up with our brain-mind interface where it is filtered by our individual learning processes, i.e., blocked, welcomed, or given limited access to continue on its way to operate within our mind and memory. The stimulus that makes it through the interface is then translated into symbolic representation and passed to our working memory to become a part of our human consciousness (declarative memory) or sub-consciousness (non-declarative memory) (Johnston 2009; Squire and Zola 1996).

Here is where one recognizes the central role that these patterns play in forming and operating our learning system. A true understanding of the personalized learning connections of each learner will guide learners and trainers how to ‘handle’ sensory stimuli and make sense of them. Achieving control is the key to learning. Thus, while, as the literature contends, it is important for all senses to be respected in channelling stimulus into the brain, it is equally crucial to have knowledge of each learner’s patterned combination to help each learner make sense of the task at hand. This knowledge is also crucial for intentional learners to be able to ‘tether’ or ‘stretch’ his/her learning patterns to make optimal use of his/her learning potential because, as Johnston puts it, “(F)inding Your Way is about taking hold of how you learn and making it work for you so that you can navigate your daily life as well as your future” (Johnston 2007).

This metacognitive enquiry involves trainers in the learning process as learners and collaborators and not merely in the traditional role of trainer that has all the answers. The process will hopefully lead to an awareness of each learner’s unique needs, not just on the trainer’s delivery of information, or on the assignments themselves, devoid of the learner’s stance towards them.

Through the knowledge of the trainees learning processes trainers can facilitate the task analysis process (see figure 4), help in the identification of the patterns required for successful completion of the task and assist the learner to strategize for meeting these demands (see table 1 and table 2)

Categories	Description
General or specific training objective	Warm-up activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the participants learn how to introduce themselves and get to know each other better not only on a personal level but also on a cultural level; introducing diversity.
Task	oral: monologue / listening
Training resources	materials from the participants' country of origin (music, photographs, videos, typical products, clothing material, instruments, tools, shells, rocks, spices etc.)
Visual or technical support	audiovisual media flipchart
Procedures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The participants present their resources pointing out some specific aspects of their own culture (country / town, city, village / feasts / food / ceremonies...) The trainer writes keywords, phrases and sentences on the flipchart
Training methods	individual / group / plenary work
Time input	45'-60'
Notes	<p>This activity presupposes that Participants are asked beforehand to bring typical resources / artefacts from their country in order to take active part in the lesson.</p> <p>This is a very good activity especially for those who lead with technical reasoning but you might find that they are very economical in their communication. As a trainer you might need to ask questions to help them divulge more information.</p> <p>Those with a strong Precision might need to be controlled so as not to take over the session, giving too detailed information.</p> <p>When you take notes on the flipchart make sure you organize it well otherwise it might be disturbing to some, especially to those that have strong sequential score.</p>

Figure 4. A prototype activity with notes decoding the activity's use of patterns required.

The operational patterns (of sequence, precision, technical reasoning and confluence) which form the dynamic relationship of the three mental processes of cognition, conation and affectation interact to form personalized combinations which eventually help the learner make sense of the task and learning arrangement and strategize for successful completion. The tool used for capturing one's personalized learning processes is the Learning Connection Inventory (Johnston & Dainton 1997), an inventory that captures the intensity of the combination of the four learning patterns. Once this is captured, a process follows to help the learner use the four patterns with intention and negotiate learning environment effectively.

Once the individual's unique learning combination has been established, learners and trainers can make use of a series of metacognitive strategies for

utilizing the best methods for accessing knowledge and/or learning a skill. This metacognitive process transforms the way we understand the learning scenario – from a trainer focus scenario in which the trainee is perceived as a passive recipient of content and passive performer of pre-packaged skills/strategies to an intentional performer, an active learner who is involved in meta-analysis of the compatibility between the task and his/her own (the learner’s) approach to learning. Here learning is highlighted and moved to the frontal consciousness level so as to affectively and intentionally perform (see figure 5 – The Learner – An Intentional Performer).

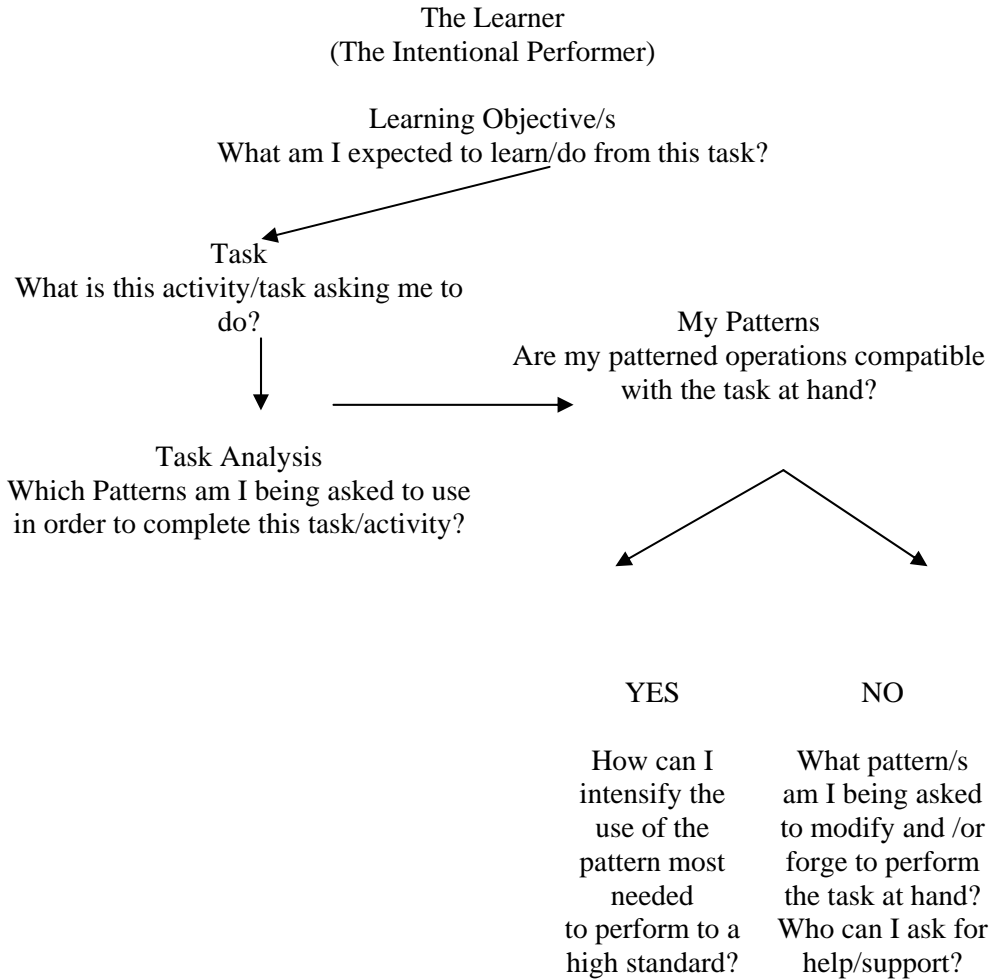


Figure 5. The Learner: An Intentional Performer

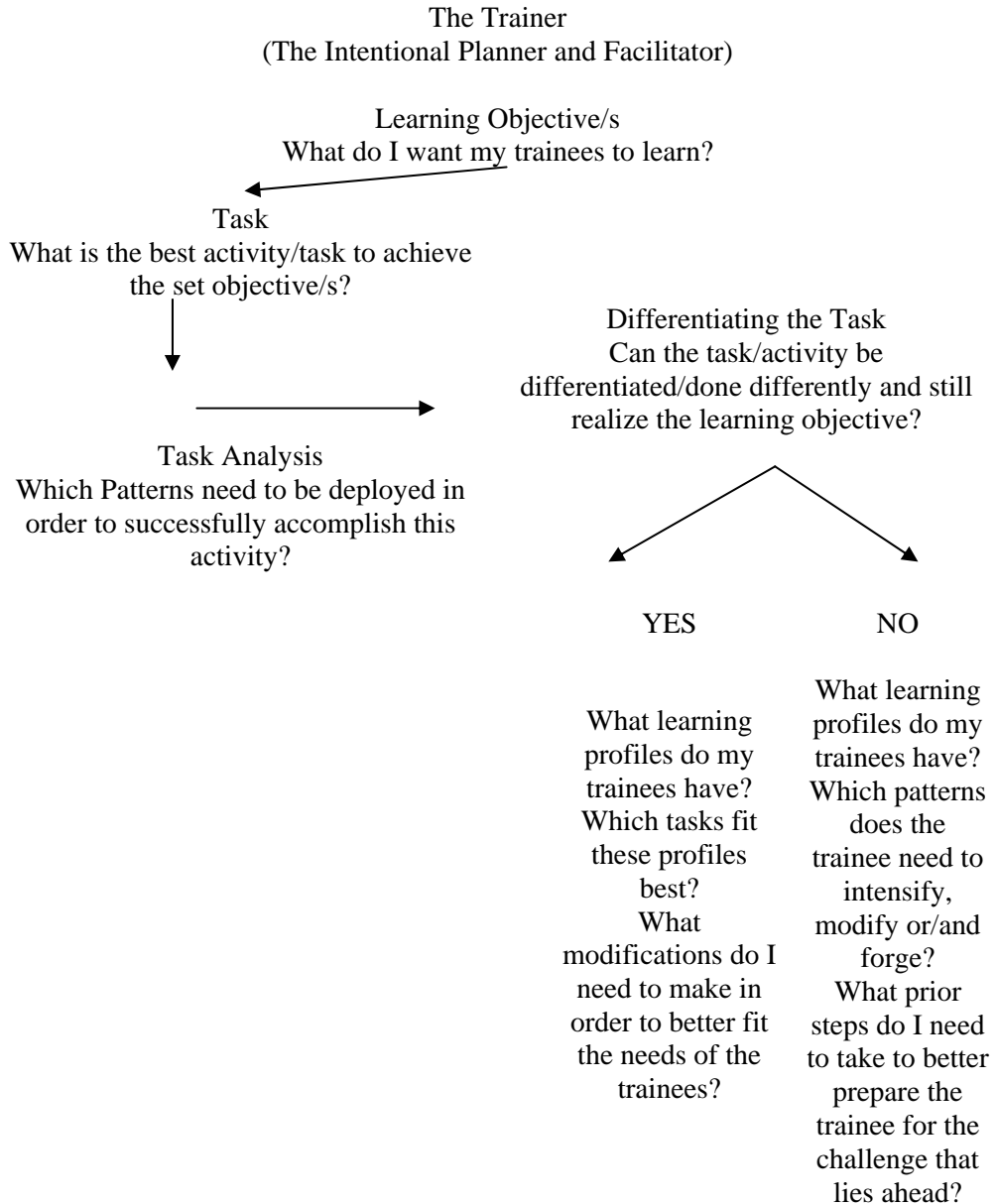


Figure 6. The Trainer: An Intentional Planner and Facilitator

This process also alters the role of the trainer. Figure 6 illustrates how the trainer’s perceptions and assumptions about learning, and specifically about how a specific learning episode can be taught, are brought to the awareness level and analysed in the light of the learner’s profile. The trainer’s role will then change for one of a facilitator of the process through supportive interventions and negotiated strategies

(see table 1: Sample strategies for forging patterns and table 2: Sample strategies for tethering patterns).

F O R G I N G I N G S	SEQUENCE	PRECISION	TECHNICAL REASONING	CONFLUENCE
		<p>__ read the directions carefully</p> <p>__ mark off each step as I go</p> <p>__ look for words that ask for me to respond using a specific order or organization</p> <p>__ double check my work for completeness</p> <p>__ make sure that I follow the key directions step-by-step</p> <p>__ make sure that I do not start something until I have all of the directions or unless I have permission to try a different approach</p> <p>__ work to follow through with one project from beginning to the end</p> <p>__ look to see if I can work with someone who uses sequence as needed</p>	<p>__ take my time and carefully read over all of the information</p> <p>__ read the subtitles to know where to gather information</p> <p>__ don't trust my memory; and write it down!</p> <p>__ look for words that ask for important facts or details</p> <p>__ answer questions using at least two full sentences</p> <p>__ double check my work for accuracy</p> <p>__ whenever possible, ask questions about things I am not sure of</p> <p>__ look to see if I can work with someone who uses precision as needed</p>	<p>__ be willing to show others what I know by demonstrating something or building it</p> <p>__ use whatever tools that are given to me to show what I know</p> <p>__ remind myself that I can learn from experiences, so observe and absorb the experience as it is occurring</p> <p>__ look to see if I can work with someone who uses technical as needed</p> <p>__ look for words that ask me to build or make something</p> <p>__ think about how I can apply this to my life</p> <p>__ stick with the task until I can make it work</p>

Table 1. Sample strategies for forging patterns (Let Me Learn Inc 2005).

TETHERING STRATEGIES	SEQUENCE	PRECISION	TECHNICAL REASONING	CONFLUENCE
	<p>__ when the directions aren't clear think of an assignment that was similar to the current task and make up your own directions</p> <p>__ think through the steps carefully before asking what I am to do</p> <p>__ take a deep breath when plans change and take the risk to not be in control for the moment</p> <p>__ when there is a time limit don't panic and place a star by the most important areas that need to be double-checked</p> <p>__ remember that not everyone has the same plan as me</p> <p>__ allow wait time for others to respond</p> <p>__ don't panic when the final product doesn't look like the example</p>	<p>__ answer the question first and add detail if there is time</p> <p>__ remember that not everyone communicates in words</p> <p>__ think about the question before I ask. Sometimes I already know the answer(trust myself).</p> <p>__ remember to allow others to share their information</p> <p>__ don't get hung-up on mistakes. Correct them and move on.</p> <p>__ remember that there are times when I don't have to prove my point</p> <p>__ seek to prioritize the amount of information that needs to be shared out loud or on paper</p>	<p>__ take short breaks to refresh and keep motivated</p> <p>__ remember that I can communicate using words</p> <p>__ know that when I work with others they have something to teach me too</p> <p>__ try to connect with the task faster rather than mulling for a long period of time</p> <p>__ remember that I have something that is valuable to teach others</p> <p>__ if I can't get it to work and there's a time limit ask for help</p> <p>__ keep in mind that not everything has a purpose or has to work</p>	<p>__ remember that not everyone likes change</p> <p>__ don't get discouraged if my idea is not used</p> <p>__ make sure to follow the assignment's objectives and if I'm not sure, ask</p> <p>__ work to not wait until the very last minute. This will give me time to make corrections and allow it to be more complete.</p> <p>__ allow others to share their opinions</p> <p>__ remember that others may need help "seeing" my idea and its connections to the task</p> <p>__ stick to the task, don't let my mind wander</p> <p>__ remember to rehearse before I express</p>

Table 2. Sample strategies for tethering patterns (Let Me Learn Inc 2005).

The above strategies are only some examples of learner-generated responses to a learning situation once s/he is fully aware of his/her learning profile, that is what works in order to effectively integrate in the path to learning. As learners become more efficient in decoding learning activities and interpret them in light of their personalized combination of learning patterns, they start generating their own strategies for forging and tethering learning patterns.

Conclusion

Senge (1990: 160) asserted that “structures of which we are unaware hold us prisoners”. This paper argued that structures we create to support learning and training can in fact be hurdles in the way of the learners’ learning process. It is only through a conscious decoding of activities in respect of their demands on the processing learning patterns and subsequent negotiated patterns’ management strategies, would such activities empower learners to have control of their intended learning. It was also argued that through such an awareness of the learning process, trainers could modify the activities to respond to the learners’ particular needs. This paper attempted to explain how intercultural communication training could develop a training environment that is conducive to learning through being respectful of the learners’ characteristics. Thus while promoting respect for intercultural diversity, the process is respectful of the individual’s preference of engagement in learning. This paper reported on the methodology developed and adopted by a Grundtvig 1.1 project that produced the Spices Guidelines (Klein et al. 2007).

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