

Intercultural Communication Seminar

Inquiring the Training Needs

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European training program intended to improve
intercultural communication between the public
administration and the people, sponsored by the European
Commission.

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Portuguese organization by the
Multicultural Studies Center,
Independent University
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Introduction

This diagnosis of training needs was made through a questionnaire to all the participants, previous to the seminar. The results were then crosschecked at the end of the actual seminar, in order to evaluate the success of the module.

There were 17 participants, both in the previous diagnosis and at the seminar, according to the presence list. The participants were monitors, teachers, supervisors and staff involved one way or another with those inmates staying at the reeducation center.

All the participants were adults; 8 males and 9 females. 4 have coordination responsibilities; the other 10 work under the responsibility of these coordinators and the last 3 do not belong directly to the Center but were allocated to it by other official institutions.

Since the answers were free, we decided to transcript all the answers for a better analysis. After each point we will sum up the main needs identified at the conclusion.

The Multicultural Studies Centre made the translation into English.

Identified Needs by the staff of the Education Center

Previous Questions:

Question 1: How would you define the multicultural environment?

2 of the total 17 respondents did not answer. The majority of other participants (54%) defined the multicultural environment as a value added situation in which people can benefit from the experiences and expectations of the others, and can learn other viewpoints to realities long assumed as unproblematic. The remaining choose to consider it a challenge to their professional skills, sometimes a stressing and discouraging one, but expressed their commitment to overcome such challenge by further training and learning.

Question 2: What is to you a situation of intercultural communication?

4 participants did not answer. 70% of the respondents considered that a situation of multicultural communication was such one as requiring specific "translation" tasks, and in which established values, beliefs and attitudes did not apply. 30% answered that

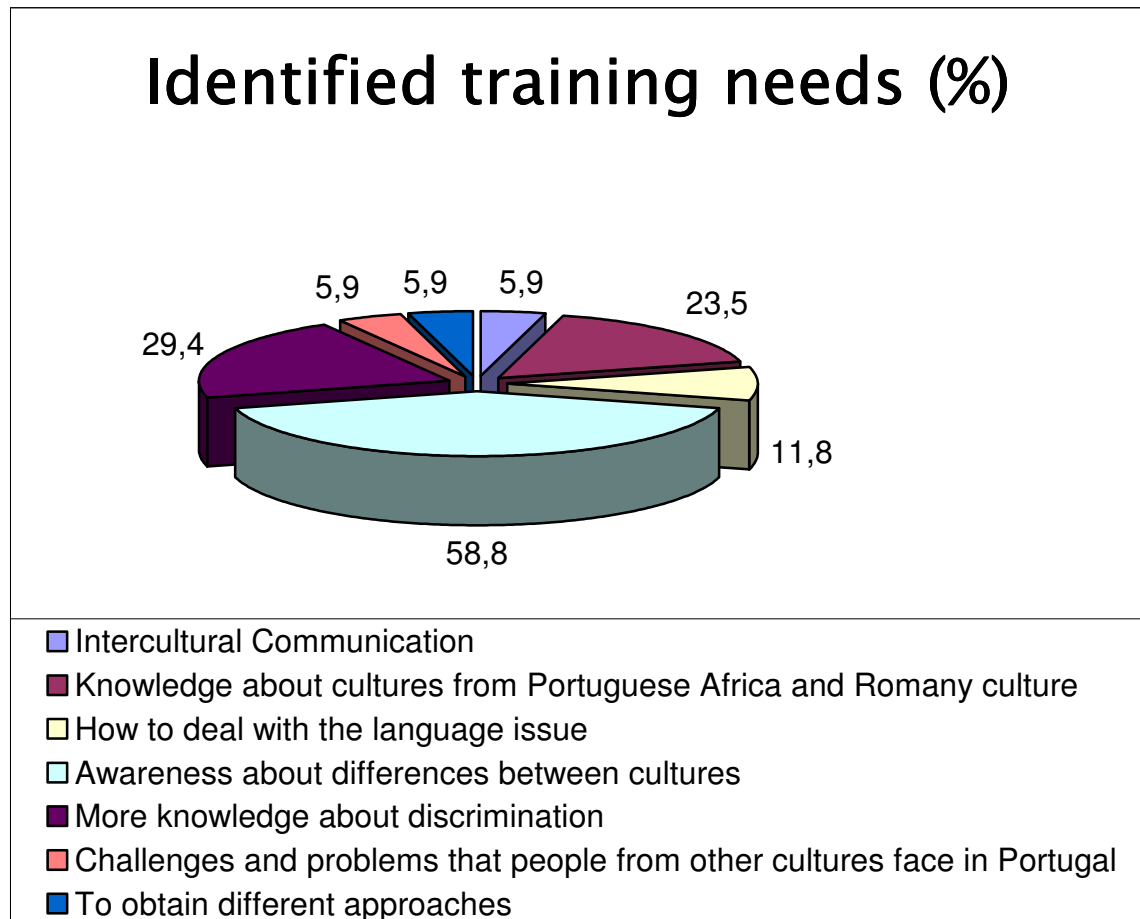
such situation reflected an asymmetric power relation, in which some were supposed to be getting instructions and the others to accept them according to their face value, without the chance to refuse or to criticize the kind of directions they were taking. In other words, intercultural communication meant to explain to an outsider “the rules of the game he had to play” in the words of one respondent.

Question 3: What kind of subjects would you like to be approached in this training seminar?

1. Every training activity supplies other points of view and new information, helping us to adopt different approaches to different cultures.
2. Deeper knowledge about the cultures from Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau; Difficulties with the various languages.
3. The need to know better particular cultures such as those from Angola, Cape Verde and Romany (Gypsies).
4. Need of a better understanding of cultural diversity and communication problems.
5. As an African, I am very interested in knowing and compare other cultures.
6. I wish to understand better the origins of racism and the reasons invoked to discriminate among cultures.
7. I want to understand better the cultural differences of the youngsters we work with.
8. I want to understand better the phenomena of discrimination and social exclusion based on ethnic origins and to understand the advantages of living in a multicultural society, the “melting pot”.
9. I need to know more about discrimination and the different cultures of the youngsters we work with.
10. I want to know more about different ways of discrimination. Although I have some knowledge on the topic I would like to access the concepts and how does that applies to practical situations.
11. I wish to understand the challenges and problems that people from different cultures suffer in our society; the difficulties to adapt to our living conditions, and the discrimination they suffer.
12. How to work together with different cultures and how to overcome such barriers.
13. Deeper knowledge about other cultures; the knowledge and learning of “Creolo” language from Cape Verde.
14. A better knowledge of cultural differences, especially the cultures we deal with and also to understand how to overcome the communication barriers that always exist along with our daily life.
15. To know more about the cultures we deal with.
16. To understand better other cultures in order to better adapt our intervention projects to our youngsters.
17. To know more about the cultural origins of the youngsters in our center.

Conclusions

After gathering the data and for a better identification of the main training needs we summed up the above-mentioned points into 7 issues, each one identified by one color.



The main training needs identified are the following 3, respectively with 58,8%, 29,4% and 23,5% of the participants answers;

- Awareness about differences between cultures and how to overcome and deal with them
- More knowledge about the discrimination issues
- Knowledge about specific cultures from Portuguese Africa and Romany (Gypsy) culture

Question 4: Do you feel the need for information and training in the intercultural communication field?

All the 17 participants answered “YES”, acknowledging their need of training in intercultural communication and multicultural competence.

Question 5: What kind of materials should be used in such a training?

Case studies: 8 answers

Role-play: 6 answers

Conference by specialists: 4 answers

Readings: 2 answers

Movies: 9 answers

Presentation and discussion of their own experiences: 5 answers

Each respondent was asked to check 2 main materials; total answers 34.

Needs Covered by the actual Seminar

After the seminar took place the respondents were questioned if it had satisfied their needs identified in Question 3. They produced 64,7% of answers saying “Yes, it completely satisfied the needs that I felt”, while 35,3% of the participants answered that “it satisfied partially the needs that I felt”. There was no answer saying that it did not fulfill any of the acknowledged needs.

Some of the comments about the final results of the seminar:

- It brought, especially through testimonies of the guest speakers, experiences from people belonging to other cultures. Our self-awareness as trainees was very important as well.
- I had access to very important approaches to the understanding of other cultures.
- Through the real examples given by the trainers we got access to solutions and potential ways to overcome daily issues. I became more aware.
- Several specific situations were discussed and that allowed me to increase my knowledge on other cultures.
- It was a seminar with a high educational level, and using deep anthropologic knowledge.
- It brought to me several ideas and examples about the phenomena of discrimination.
- It allowed me to add some more knowledge about other cultures.
- I received important skills to the practice of intercultural communication.
- It allowed me to understand better the culture of the youngsters we work with, and some cultural values that I was not aware of.
- It made possible a reflection and debate leading us to identify new needs in our work with the re-education center’s users.
- This training was more directed to solutions on intercultural communication. It is a start and not an end in itself.
- It fulfilled all my needs and allowed us the exchange of experiences, opening our minds to curiosity about other cultures and to the pursuit of personal

improvement (mediation between the discriminatory agent and the person discriminated).

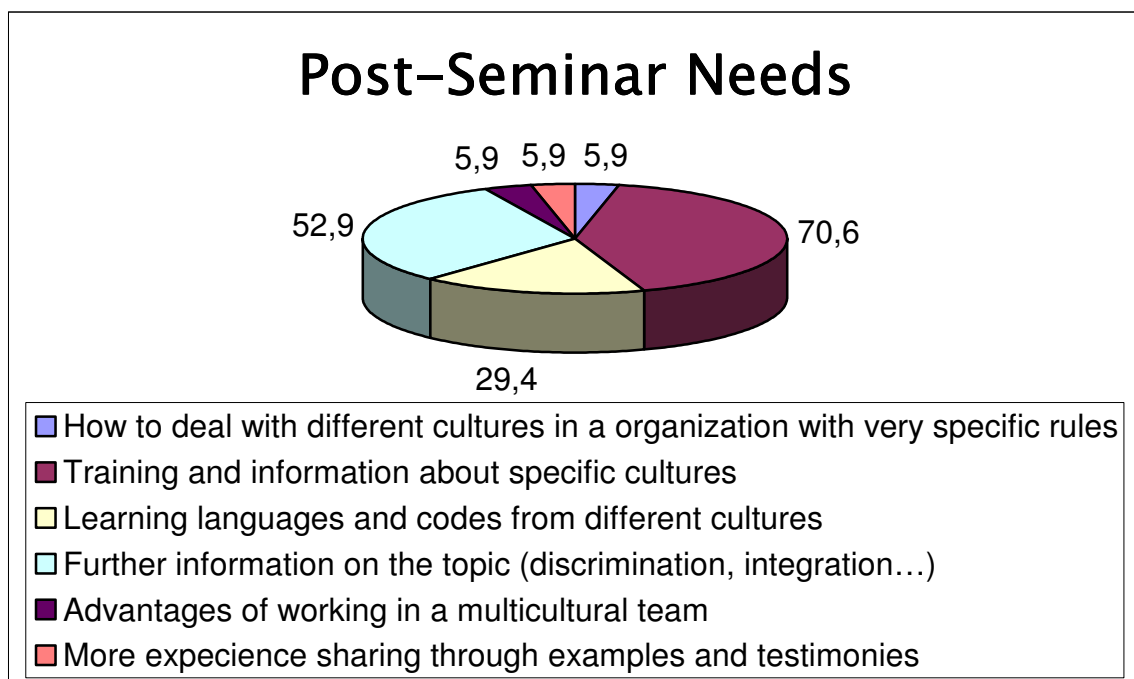
- It did not fulfill all the needs, but it contributed to the increase of our multicultural knowledge.
- I became aware of certain prejudices that only now I can recognize.
- I was not so sensitive about the several kinds of discrimination and prejudices in our societies. It is a valuable contribution to me as a person.

After this we identified the needs that were not fulfilled together with the ones that were created by the seminar itself.

Post-Seminar Identified Needs

Since there were some needs, either created by the seminar itself, or that were not entirely fulfilled by the seminar, we decided to spot them as a valuable contribution to the follow up of the INTI Project and as a potential contribution to the next seminars.

It is important to stress that the participants were very willing to pursue the gathering of knowledge by their own means.



As we can easily see in the graphic above, 70,6% of the participants identified the further need to have training on specific cultures, such as those from the African Portuguese-speaking countries. This is due to the fact that always more than half of the population at the re-education center belong to families with a recent African background.

52,9% of the participants identified also the need to keep study the main Seminar topics in order to gain a better knowledge of the issues, namely the several kinds of discrimination and cultural integration.

It is important to stress that 29,4% of the participants identified the need to learn the different languages and communication codes from such exogenous cultures, namely the Cape-Verdean Creole.

Lisbon, February 2005.

Project INTI/Lisbon Team.