

Intercultural Meetings – Complementary language Education for Medical Doctors and Dentists

“Intercultural Meetings” is a pilot project on a small scale. It took place during the autumn 2009. The overall objective was to offer complementary language training for recently employed medical doctors and dentists from abroad working within Örebro County Council, Sweden. A specific objective was to try out a method: we believed that getting the chance to visit art institutions and engage in cultural activities would deepen and improve the communication ability for the employees, in regard to both patients and colleagues. Through meetings with artists, head of cultural institutions and cultural workers, we wanted the foreign physicians to achieve a greater understanding of the interrelationship between culture, language and society. The geographical coverage was Örebro County.

Target Groups

Target groups were coming from abroad medical doctors and dentists recently employed in the hospitals and health care within Örebro County Council. In long term the course is intended to include all staff coming from abroad, e.g. nurses and assistant nurses.

Partners

The pilot project included different departments, hospitals and dental care within the Örebro County Council, and 6 regional or local cultural institutions.

Practical background and needs assessment of the project

Sweden today is a multicultural country. 14 % of the population is foreign born representing more than 220 nationalities. It is the same proposition that is valid for the working force in our hospitals. We know that the communication between physician and patient is an important prerequisite for a successful treatment. A good communication is not only due to the spoken language but implies an understanding of the wider cultural context and social environment. The recently employed staff coming from abroad undergo an effective, however relatively short training in the Swedish language and it is a great challenge for them to cope with their situations in their new country. Many of them need more language training and to practice more to be fluent and more comfortable with both colleagues and patients. One way of helping them improve their language skills is to arrange the possibilities for them to meet with other people and situations than in the office.

Theoretical background of the project

This is not a project based on strictly scientific methods, however it is based on the assumptions that culture gives an added value to the training of foreign languages and communications. During the project period the participants have taken part in intercultural meetings with six different cultural institutions. They have been introduced to the institutions by the head of the institution and they have attended a cultural activity e.g. a theatre performance, a concert, an art exhibition or lectures about film and art. Discussions and dialogues have followed every course occasion between the participants, the course-leaders and the representatives for the cultural institutions. This put together gave the participants greater opportunity to practise the Swedish language in a broader context than at work. The project continued during a three months period, from October until

December 2009. The meetings were held in the afternoons directly after the employees` regular working hours, every fortnight and lasted for three hours. The activities were as follows: a concert at the Concert Hall; a theatre play at the County Theatre, an exhibition of folklore and art at the County Museum; arts in hospital in the University Hospital of Örebro; watching film clips at the Municipality Cinema and studying an art exhibition at the local Municipality Art Gallery.

Practical Experience

The project was very much appreciated amongst the participants and all the others meeting within the frame of the project. The participants felt that they got a good overview of the local cultural life that was quite unknown to them before the course started. Furthermore, the project gave them an opportunity to meet with colleagues outside the working place and to practice the Swedish in a new context. The intercultural meetings between people from different countries, different sectors and cultures were positive experiences for everyone. However, the group of participants should have been larger. They were only twelve when the course began and due to the schedules working hours it was difficult for them to participate at every course meeting. The way of recruiting showed to be the mayor difficulty and with a follow-up, the way of recruiting has to be considered very carefully. We also strongly believe that it would be a positive added value if the course includes other professional categories, e.g. nurses and nurse assistants. We think that it would be a good thing that the Intercultural Meeting Course can be integrated into the regular introduction for recently employed foreign staff. Success factors were many, e.g. right political climate, several politician show a great interest and want to develop the concept. We had sufficient funds (it was a rather inexpensive small pilot project), the management was really good and met up with a very engaged target group.

Effect and Evaluations

The project has been evaluated by the Department of Community Medicine and Public Health. The evaluation was based on interviews with the participants and the course leaders. The evaluation is documented in a report, "Interkulturella möten för nyanställda utländska läkare i Örebro läns landsting; Deltagarna och kursledarnas perspektiv". (Anne-Marie Wallin). It is difficult to see any immediate effects on the target group in this short perspective, however the participants showed great satisfaction and expressed a wish for a continuation.

Perspectives and exchange of Experiences

The future perspectives are that we would like to do the project one more time to gather more evaluation material. We would strongly recommend to include more professional groups and we think that this specific course also should be integrated into the regular introduction for recently employed foreign staff. It is of great importance that a course like this is integrated within the ordinary program for further education.

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