

'Whoever is There is the Right People' principle from Open Space Technology

It is interesting to translate the above principle to an educational setting at the Columbia EAFIT University when training with a 27 membered very diverse group of students. Some were from European countries, they had varied language skills and varied skill levels when starting the seminar 'Creativity and Innovation in Product Design'. The Columbian students were mostly used to classical teaching and not the interactive way the seminar was set up. As a very experienced professor and facilitator, Marc brought the group on



its way and I added a morning of group dynamics, trust formation in international groups and how to work with starting phases of creative sessions.



The two major themes in the group dynamic lecture were: firstly, 27 people are not a team but can be a community with varying teams; secondly, trust development is based on self acceptance and acceptance; once that is come

about the group can communicate.

We discussed major pitfalls of international groups and the group generated ideas and options how to manage these; for instance using visual and non-verbal language, allowing for high tolerance, getting to know each other on a more personal level. That was helpful, but in the end I had miscalculated the language difficulty. Alas,



not speaking Spanish myself I stayed too much in my safe cocoon of English and overlooked the fear that needs to be overcome when speaking a language one is not fluent in. It was a major hurdle only taken at the end of the days by many inspirations, challenges, invitations from our side and by the courage of the Columbian students who broke the 'language wall'.

Really helpful were all the funny, childlike icebreakers we used when energy was low or when starting a creative session. As they are ego deflating they brought this young group into a fun and laughter atmosphere like when we did a chair race on wheeled chairs around the room.

As I had said something about the importance of closure, I designed the following closing ritual. We sat in a circle in our wheeled chairs and I asked each of them to take a bunch of post-its and write a few words on their 'learning, appreciation and gratitude.'



“What did you learn? What did you



appreciate about yourself and others? Please express what are you grateful for in this group. These are things that make people happy and please, remember, that maybe the persons that *irritated you most* maybe were your *best teachers* as they might have taught you tolerance and collaboration.” This is working with the open space principle as a trainer and facilitator

We started the closure assignment with a picture-show so everyone could go through the setting again revive their memories and appreciate the journey this group had made together. This was accompanied by Latin music and Dutch Stroopwafels (cookies) while everybody took individual notes. The round of feedback worked out wonderfully and in the end this made the group leave on a 'high' with lots of encouragements to work and facilitate themselves.



After five days we received enthusiastic reports of students working with creative workshops successfully.

With many greetings to you

Helga Hohn

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