

THE WEIGHT OF EXPATRIATE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL BAGGAGE: CONSEQUENCES ON 21st CENTURY TRAINING

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Abstract

The Intercultural & Language Program of the Agence ITER France has trained over 3000 expatriates since 2006. These expatriates are of 35 nationalities and come mostly from Europe, China, The United States, South Korea, India, Japan and Russia.

They arrive alone or with their families for an average contract time of 5 years, working for the ITER Organization, an international scientific project, in the South of France.

The experience acquired through welcome and departure interviews, in-situ training and training observation, satisfaction questionnaires and in depth studies conducted within a partnership with the Aix-Marseille University, has generated the following questions:

- Have our expatriates become more interculturally-aware over the last 10 years?
- Do our linguistic and intercultural training programs respond well to new needs?
- Are training program designers still influenced by obsolete intercultural paradigms?
- How can we create a better learning environment for these global nomads?
- Can these training skills and concepts be used in other migration contexts?
- Can we learn from other migrant contexts to improve our programs?

In this paper, we will explore the possible answers found so far and study the potential implications of the latter on international training.

Peer to peer learning, the training of English native speakers to communicate more efficiently with non-native speakers, the creation of learning communities who become support groups to help integrate “the other” in the host country culture, intercultural sessions facilitated by those whose culture is being studied, are some of the solutions proposed and which have been implemented in our program.

However, the search for more efficient, contemporary expatriate education is still ongoing. The basic hypothesis defended is that global nomads are constantly changing whereas expatriate training programs do not seem to change fast enough.

Key words: expatriate, language, culture, intercultural, training, onboarding.