

Advancing Intercultural Competence for Global Learners

ADVANCING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR GLOBAL LEARNERS

cmcwebb



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Introduction

Introduction

Welcome to Advancing Intercultural Competence for Global Learners. This program is divided into three interconnected modules to nurture your intercultural competence more holistically.

1. **Module 1: Creating Intercultural Awareness and Understanding Attitudes**
Where you learn about what influences people's judgements and identify strategies to suspend judgement while appreciating other perspectives.
2. **Module 2: Expanding Your Intercultural Knowledge**
Where you explore and develop a greater understanding of values, the role of non-verbal communication in interactions, and the importance of expanding your knowledge of global issues.
3. **Module 3: Developing Your Intercultural Skills**
Where you identify ways to develop and enhance your intercultural skills, including reflection, communication, critical thinking, and ways to approach interactions.

The estimated time-to-completion is four hours per module, totalling 12 hours for the entire program.



Mossholder, T. (2019). Group of people taking picture. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-people-taking-picture-3063478/>

You may choose to complete the modules independently if you want to focus on a specific area of development, although the best learning experience comes from a combination of the three modules. Whatever you choose, we encourage you to engage with the content, take time to reflect on what you are learning, be open to new perspectives, and use the strategies suggested in your everyday interactions.

Navigating this program

The three modules follow a student-engagement approach where you involve yourself with the content through self-reflection, interactive activities with automatic feedback, summaries of key points, and strategies to support your intercultural development as a global learner.

In every module, you will find interactive activities, definitions, and questions for reflection. You can also follow the links to the Glossary section at any time to expand your knowledge, review terms, or just to have an overview of the concepts used across the three modules.

Key Concepts

In this section, you will explore two key concepts, **global learner** and **intercultural competence (IC)**, in an interactive way. This will help you gain a better understanding of what the program is focused on and what you can expect when interacting with the content.

It is important to ensure you understand what is meant by a global learner to have a clearer idea of what you are aiming for as you immerse yourself in the intercultural learning process.

Activity: What is a Global Learner?



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=508#h5p-21>

Think About This

How close was your understanding of global learner to the definition provided? In what way was it similar? How was it different? In what way does being a global learner help you in your personal and professional life?

Intercultural vs cross-cultural

Although we often hear these two terms used interchangeably, they are, in fact, not the same, as explained below: **Intercultural** (e.g., competence, communication, engagement) focuses on a deeper understanding of interactions between cultures and the mutual exchange of ideas from a more holistic and comprehensive perspective.

Cross-cultural (e.g., communication, studies, or interactions) involves comparisons of different cultures around a particular aspect; for example, work values in Switzerland versus Saudi Arabia, or how people greet each other in Canada compared to Spain.

Since our program content is not limited to comparisons across cultures, you will see references to intercultural competence, communication, studies, interactions, engagement, and so on. Your objective is to develop a better understanding of what happens within, around, and beyond interactions, to equip you with ways to learn about different perspectives, to help you develop skills, and overall to support your intercultural learning journey.

What is intercultural Competence?

Intercultural competence is a complex process—a multi-faceted set of abilities—that influence the way we interact and think, what we do and avoid doing, the decisions we make, and how all of these affect our own group as well as cultural others.

Perhaps you already have a notion of intercultural competence; even if you do not, there are ideas around it that we need to clarify. Let's start with that!

Activity: Truths about intercultural competence

Examine each statement below and decide whether they are true or false in terms of your own understanding of intercultural competence.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=508#h5p-22>

Takeaway points

- A global learner constantly engages with cultural groups to develop intercultural competence; they do not focus solely on learning about the more tangible elements of culture but also focus on improving their understanding of self, local, or global cultures, issues, behaviours, and attitudes. Doing so allows them to change cultural lenses and become more adaptable. In short, a global learner is a person who never stops learning.

Intercultural competence development...

- is not mainly focused on how we act and react.
- cannot be achieved within a specific timeframe.
- involves learning about ourselves as well as others.
- involves a process that is different from one person to another.
- emphasizes the appreciation of difference and respect between cultural groups.
- can be explained and understood through different models derived from research.
- is a transformative process, not a set of guidelines, checklist, or list of cultural comparisons.
- cannot be measured, but we can identify where we are, in general terms, within the process.
- involves developing empathy, respect, curiosity, and openness towards people, experiences, and perspectives.
- helps us understand actions and reactions as well as mistakes and ways to deal with them.
- is not the same as anti-racism, although the two complement each other to disrupt injustice and promote anti-racist perspectives and behaviours that can help transform society.

Well done!

Now you have a better understanding of what the program is about and what you can expect. Start engaging with the content in the modules and enjoy the journey!

Further Resources and References

References

- Bramwell, J. (2020). *What skills do global learners have in common?* British Council. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/global-learner-skills>
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241—266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>

Module 1: Creating Intercultural Awareness and Understanding Attitudes

About This Module

This module focuses on helping you create awareness of your own and others' cultural selves while introducing strategies to suspend judgement when you perceive people to be different from you. Through the content and interactive exercises, you will engage with real-life examples to understand and appreciate multiple cultural perspectives, as well as to develop the skill of self-reflection, which are important in intercultural interactions.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- identify what influences one's judgement and demonstrate awareness of one's distinct background,
- identify at least two strategies to deal with stereotypes, bias, and microaggressions,
- explain why specific attitudes, actions, and reactions are problematic,
- identify at least two strategies to develop an appreciation for others' perspectives and lived experiences.

Keywords

You can refer to the glossary at any time to find definitions of these and other keywords:

Culture, Iceberg Theory, Ethnocentrism, Bias, Stereotype, Microaggression

Setting the Scene

Our very survival has never required greater **cooperation** and greater **understanding** among **all people** from all places than at this moment in history. And when that happens — when people set aside their **differences**, even for a moment, to work in **common** effort toward a common goal; when they struggle **together**, and sacrifice together, and **learn from one another** — then all things are possible.

United States of America (USA) President Barack Obama (Commencement speech, University of Notre Dame, 2016)

Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants. Years of study have convinced me that the real job is not to understand foreign culture, but **to understand our own**.

Edward T. Hall, Anthropologist

Think about this

- To what degree do the ideas behind these quotes resonate with you?
- Why is it important to learn about differences and to learn from one another?
- Why is it important to understand our own culture?

Self-Awareness and Identity Wheel

A self-awareness and identity wheel serves as a visual representation of the different parts of an individual's personal, social, and cultural characteristics; it illustrates the construction of our self-perception and identity. Understanding ourselves by being aware of our identities and perspectives is a steppingstone to understanding how other identities are constructed and how we relate to others.

At the centre of the wheel, you find your *unconscious self*, comprising who you are as an individual and the elements of your identity that are mostly static and unchangeable. On the outside, you find your *conscious development* and how you describe yourself based on achievements and what you have gained through studying or working formally and informally. Your *geography* helps you position yourself in relation to where you live and how you relate to your surroundings. Your *choices* involve that part of your identity that reflects how you navigate your adult life and the decisions you make along the way. Your *perceptions* refer to your self-awareness regarding how you believe you are perceived and how you perceive others. Your *engagement* highlights the way you relate to others around, who is included in your circle of friends, and the extent to which you reach out of your circle of commonality. A part of your identity that combines experiences and challenges is represented as your *struggles*, which you should learn to recognize to help you understand other people's pains and troubles. Finally, your *goals* are part of your identity because they represent what drives you and what you are aiming for, whether at the personal, cultural, or societal level.

The graphic below expands on how these elements of your identity are defined. Click on each one to learn more about them. As you read, think about how you would define your own identity within each element.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=75#h5p-71>

Activity: My self-awareness and identity profile

Create your own self-awareness profile to help you build a visual of your own self-awareness and identities. The aim is to help you further understand intersectionality, how we belong to many groups at the same time, and how we relate to our surroundings.

To do this, look at the various categories below and write your own answers to each of the eight sections on a separate paper or on your word processor. Alternatively, print out the Word document [My Self-Awareness and Identity Profile](#) and complete the activity there.

Click on each card below to see some prompts to help you think about what to write. Think about this activity as a picture of your current personal, social, and cultural identity. Focus on who you are now and make sure the words or phrases you use reflect your present self, as your holistic self-identity can change over time.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=75#h5p-32>

Think about this

- Take a moment to look at your completed self-awareness and identity wheel: what did you learn about yourself?
- What, if anything, was surprising about your identity?
- What is something you had not thought about before?
- How might your self-awareness and identity shape the way you think, act, and the way you perceive and relate to others?
- If you position yourself in a different cultural context (at home or abroad), how could any element of your identity affect the way other people interact with you?

Activity: Understanding Myself in Relation to Others

Explore the following self-awareness and identity profiles from two other people. As you read through them, think about how similar or different your own responses are. Identify ways in which your self-awareness and identity profiles connect based on each of the eight elements listed.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=75#h5p-35>

Think about this

- What are some elements of Julius and Olivia’s self-awareness and identity profiles that you share?
- Was there anything that surprised you? In what ways are you different?
- What do you find interesting about their identities?
- What experiences or perceptions do you share? Based on their responses, how do you feel about them? Were they what you expected? How would you approach meeting and connecting with them?

People’s identities are multi-layered and complex. Each one of us—even if we are from the same town and went to the same places growing up—will have different experiences, outlooks, and goals. When meeting someone you perceive to be different, it is unfair to rely on the way you think they are without having had the opportunity to engage and connect with them. You would be surprised by how many ways our multi-layered identities can connect. In addition, even if you feel you cannot connect with someone due to what you consider right or wrong, there is much more to a person than you could ever imagine. Perhaps talking about your differences can help

you appreciate how others think. You do not need to become someone else to understand people, and you do not need to agree with them to gain a better understanding of how others perceive themselves and their identities. Moreover, it is key to remember that if you only connect with those who are similar to you, you will not learn about the world, what is out there, who people really are, and the changes needed in society.

Takeaway points

- By being aware of your own identity, you become more open to the many identity layers in other people.
- By recognizing your own struggles, perspectives, and privileges, you can understand your position in society and that of people around you, independent of their background, origin, or identity.
- Just because someone looks similar to or different from you, it does not mean they are what or how you think they are.
- Even if you are from the same culture, you will find many differences within the group with which you associate the most.
- Surrounding yourself exclusively with people who are just like you will severely limit your outlook. When you connect with people who are different from those in your circle of similarity, you will be able to step out of your comfort zone and start learning about what the world is really like through the people who live in it.

Try this strategy

Reach out to someone from a different cultural group—perhaps an acquaintance or someone new from the university or your workplace. Strike up a conversation and come from a place of curiosity, learn about the other person and be ready to share about your own identity, whatever feels comfortable. This will help you find commonalities where you perhaps saw mostly differences.

What is Culture?

Culture is a very complex term; there is no single definition that encompasses everything that culture is because it spans every aspect of our lives as social beings. We may hear terms such as organizational culture, team culture, and material culture, and we refer to ancient cultures or the fine arts as culture. However, what does it mean when we talk about belonging to a culture or several cultures? How does this allow us to distinguish cultures around the globe?

Think About This

Take a moment to think about what culture means to you. What do you understand by culture? If someone asks you to explain what you mean by culture, what would you say?

Activity: Defining Culture



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For our purposes, we will understand culture as

“An accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviours, shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems”

(Neuliep, 2006, p. 21).

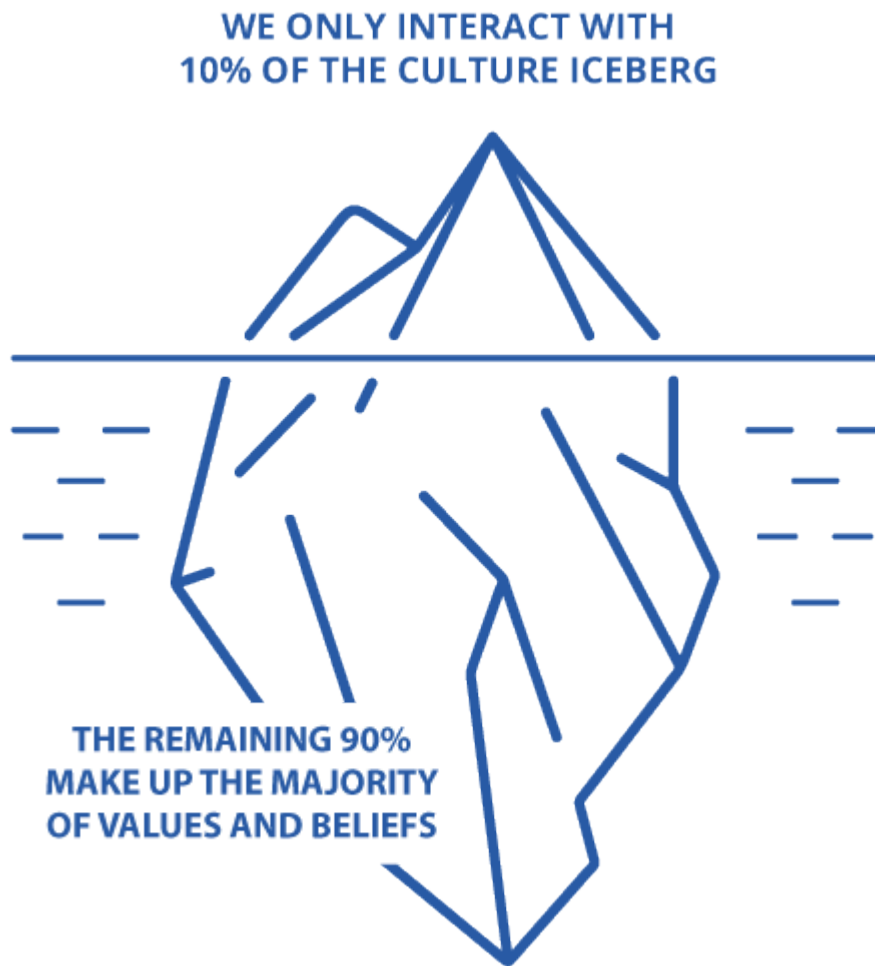
What examples of culture that you listed are included in this definition? Is there something you did not consider?

Culture Iceberg

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1976) used a visual representation of an iceberg to create a better understanding of culture and its components. Hall explains that, at the top of the iceberg, there are cultural elements one can perceive with the senses. They are learned or acquired consciously, they can change relatively easily, they can be observed, they are tangible, and one may be able to describe them without having extensive experience in another culture. Conversely, at the bottom of the iceberg, there are elements one cannot perceive with the senses. They are learned or acquired unconsciously, they are hard to change, they are intangible, and one cannot describe and understand them without having extensive experience in another culture.

[Watch the video “Cultural Iceberg” \(1’51”\)](#) that explains Hall’s theory. As you watch, try to think about more examples you would incorporate at the top and bottom of the iceberg.

When we first interact with people from a different cultural background (at home and abroad), we are only interacting with the top 10% of the culture iceberg. That is the tip of the iceberg.



Iceberg by Oleksandr Panasovskyi from NounProject.com and licensed under CC BY 3.0. Colours changed and labels added.

It is common to make assumptions or develop ideas about other cultural groups without really understanding their internal or deep culture. That is, the remaining 90% that makes up the majority of our values and beliefs.

Activity: Culture Iceberg

Look at the words listed below. Each one represents an element of culture. Decide whether they could be expected to be either at the top or bottom of the iceberg based on the descriptions below.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=89#h5p-2>

Hall's Culture Iceberg shows how elements on the surface are visible, palpable, and easier to adapt to or learn. As examples, consider how you have expanded your appreciation of music in a different language or dialect, how you have incorporated foods from other cultures into your regular meals, or how you have read literary works from writers around the globe. This is considerably easy to do while making conscious decisions to observe, try, or participate in a different cultural experience.

However, what happens with the elements at the bottom of the iceberg? As we grow up, we internalize our culture's way of thinking and being. In addition, we internalize our culture's values, ways of behaving, attitudes, philosophical concepts, approaches to work and study, ways to understand and forge relationships, family dynamics, how to show respect, and so on. It is here, at the core of our cultural background, that **most intercultural misunderstandings take place because we cannot see and understand these elements when we first meet each other.**

Only through exposure and openness to cultural learning can we create meaning and understand how these elements are similar or different to our core culture's ways of thinking, reasoning, behaving, and even feeling, which define what is considered **right and wrong within each cultural group.**

Think About This

Think about a time when you travelled somewhere and met someone from another culture:

- Were you able to understand everything around you including accents, foods, implicit rules when talking to people, what to do or not to do?
- How did you feel about the things you did not understand?
- How do you think newcomers to Canada may feel about the new surroundings?
- Depending on how familiar they are with Canadian culture, what challenges could they have?

TakeAway Points

- Most intercultural misunderstandings happen because we cannot see the hidden elements of culture, and we start making assumptions and applying our own understanding of right and wrong to other groups.
- Even when we share a common culture, we belong to different groups within the larger group, whether this is the dominant or non-dominant culture in Canada or elsewhere.
- If we focus only on what we see on the surface, we may think that a person who we initially perceive as "different" may, in fact, be more similar to us. However, we can only verify and appreciate this if we learn about others more intentionally.

Try These Strategies

- When you meet people from other cultural groups, do not focus only on learning about food, music, or how to say a few words in their language; pay attention to what seems important for the other person and how they behave so you can learn from that, keeping in mind some of the behaviours are cultural and others are individual/personal.
- Ask questions: take time to learn about people as individuals (their personality) and cultural tendencies. Asking will help you understand others better while learning to avoid making assumptions about them.

Media Attributions

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Influences and Attitudes

From childhood, we are socialized into our culture and learn about what constitutes right or wrong. At the same time, we are constantly surrounded by outlooks and teachings from our family or school and are exposed to images and content from films, news, the internet, opinions we hear from other people, and so on. These sources constantly influence us and shape the attitudes we have toward ourselves and others.

Before engaging in the activity below, take a moment to think about how you feel toward difference; this could be about doing things in a different way, having a different opinion, or having a cultural background different from yours. How open are you to living in a diverse neighbourhood? How comfortable do you feel learning about doing things differently or seeing things from a different perspective?

Activity: Influences and Attitudes

1. Read the following statements and decide whether they are acceptable or unacceptable from your own perspective. For example, how uncomfortable or annoyed would you feel if you heard someone say any of them?



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=95#h5p-23>

Think about this

Look at the statements that seem more acceptable to you, why do you think that is? What about those you marked as unacceptable? What bothers you about them? Below, you will learn about the messages statements such as these may convey.

Ethnocentrism

At some point in our lives, each one of us holds ethnocentric attitudes because we rely on what we know to be right based on our upbringing—what we learned as we were growing up. We can clearly see this when we observe or interact with people from other cultures and we start forming ideas about what they do right or wrong.

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's culture is better or superior to others, that the way we do things is right,

and the way others do things, act, or behave is wrong. It is a very limiting view that leads people to make unfair assumptions about other cultural groups and impedes the appreciation of different ways of being and behaving. The statements in the activity above show different degrees of ethnocentrism. In some, a simple change in phrasing would make a big difference. For example, instead of saying, “Hebrew and Arabic are written backwards,” it would be better to say, “Hebrew and Arabic are written from right to left.” This is a more accurate way of describing what you see that removes hidden criticism: “If it’s not written the way I do it (in English, for example), it is backwards.” Remember that for someone who grew up writing from right to left, that is the normal and correct way to write, and, from that view, perhaps English seems to be written backwards.

Taking another example from the activity, if someone says, “Nepalese food is gross,” it is quite unfair to people who grew up with it and enjoyed eating it. By the same token, the food you eat could be really strange to some people. Therefore, it would be better to say, “Nepalese food is very different from what I am used to,” which is a fair statement. Other statements in the activity are politically charged or express views that require a shift in thinking; these would take more time to inspire change. It is important to start by realizing how the way we say things can indeed be unfair or inaccurate and convey an ethnocentric tone—this should help you work toward changing an ethnocentric attitude.

Ethnocentric attitudes can hide behind expectations about others and comments in everyday conversations, as well as in advertising, curriculum content at school and university, policies, and even laws. To see this in context, watch this advertisement of Cadillac coupe 2014 and answer the three questions that follow.

Watch the [2014 Cadillac ELR TV Commercial, ‘Poolside’ \(0’56”\)](#), a commercial from Cadillac.

Activity: Ethnocentrism

Write your answer in the space provided.



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TakeAway Points

- Since we are socialized within a group where we learn to identify right and wrong through the group’s implicit rules, it is common to develop a level of ethnocentrism. However, this is not an excuse to have an ethnocentric attitude.
- The key to minimizing ethnocentric tendencies starts with being aware of your attitudes, where they come from, and being open to learning about others, understanding that other ways of doing things are just as valid.

Try These Strategies

- Pay attention to what you and others say when talking about other people or cultural groups. It is appropriate to be proud of your country and heritage, but this does not give anyone the right to devalue or look down on people with different backgrounds or national origins.
- Do not go with the flow if your friends or relatives make ethnocentric statements. Ask questions like, “How do you know they do that? Why do you think they behave that way? Have you met many people from that group? Are you close to them?”
- You can also help by rephrasing statements. For example, instead of saying “British people drive on the wrong side of the road,” say, “British people drive on the opposite side of the road.” Sometimes a small change like that can encourage people to view things from a different perspective.

Stereotypes

How would you describe people from Italy, Japan, or Mexico? What about Indigenous people from Canada or from another country? What attitudes and behaviours come to mind when you think about a Black person? What stereotypes do people have about your own cultural group? There is no shortage of stereotypes about cultural groups; they have managed to filter into our everyday lives. We may not see or be quite conscious about stereotypes, but they are always around us. One of the challenges about eliminating stereotypes is that they are very easy to perpetuate through unfair comments, jokes, inaccurate advertisements, media, and so on. Stereotypes can support a vicious circle of false beliefs directed at different cultural groups while creating a social stigma among those very groups. For this reason, we must understand them; to deconstruct stereotypes, we need to face them.

Activity: Identifying Stereotypes

Think about the associations you make in terms of cultural attributes, icons, values, or behaviours for the following people. What stereotypes can you identify for each one of them?



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Think About This

Looking back at the stereotypes you identified, consider the following questions:

- Do you know many people from those countries?
- Have you ever visited or lived amongst them?
- Where did you learn about them?
- How do you know about their behaviours, symbols, and icons?
- Where do you think those stereotypes came from?

Where Do Cultural Stereotypes Come From?

Unless you have travelled extensively, immersed yourself in another culture, have a continuous relationship with people from other countries, or have taken time to study other cultures, it is likely that what you know about other people comes from external influences: Something you watched in a film, repeated iconography added to advertisements, products, or displayed in shops, or they could originate from something you heard from a relative at the dinner table, from a friend's comments, or even based on a single event you experienced.

When we have limited awareness or knowledge of other cultures, we tend to rely on stereotypes as sources of information. By doing this, we perpetuate ideas of groups that do not reflect reality.

Stereotypes are overgeneralizations of perceived behaviours applied to an entire group based on limited observations and an oversimplification of ideas.

Some stereotypes may seem positive. For example, “Black people are great athletes, Latin Americans are great dancers, Japanese women are hard-working,” but they are still overgeneralizations of potential attributes associated with a group. One of the problems this creates is that when we meet someone from that group, we expect them to be like their stereotype and feel disappointed when they are not.

It is important to consider that within each cultural or national context, racial stereotypes tend to favour and highlight the positive and desirable attributes of the dominant race or group (e.g., White Canadians) while devaluing or limiting the appreciation of minority groups (e.g., Black Canadians, Indigenous peoples, Southeast Asians, and so on). Stereotypes can and often lead to unfair treatment of people because of the assumptions and attitudes they produce. Stereotypes may become prejudice, which further becomes actions that contribute to discrimination.

Prejudice is a preconceived opinion of a group that is not based on reason or derived from experience through interactions. It means having negative opinions of others without sufficient knowledge. Prejudice results from constantly relying on unfair representations of a group and lead to hatred or discrimination.

Discrimination is an unjust action or unfair treatment of a person or a group on the grounds of their identity. For instance, based on race, sex, ability, or origin.

Constantly relying on unfair representations of a group affects the way we interact with and judge other people. This can work on an unconscious level, but can also turn into policy, where unjust practices can hide. In addition, stereotypes are damaging to people because they can put pressure on members of culturally diverse groups to be more like members of the dominant group.

Activity: Pressures of stereotypes

[Watch this TED Talk by Canwen Xu, “I’m not your Asian stereotype” \(9’38”\)](#) and pay attention to the examples she provides and her discussion on conforming to or confronting the dominant group. Keep in mind that, although her example addresses a Chinese-American identity, her story reflects the experience of people across many countries. As you watch, think about your own experience and pressures around you and how this may reflect the experience of people you know that perhaps you have not considered before.

To follow up, think about the following questions and enter your answer in the space provided.

Based on Canwen Xu’s talk...



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=100#h5p-9>

Canwen Xu’s talk makes reference to the American melting pot, an idea embraced in the United States in the 20th century that continues to be supported by many, where cultural differences “melt down” to create a single, strong national identity. The expectation is that people who are different should assimilate into the culture and be more like the mainstream American. The problem with this is that it assumes that assimilating into the American culture is the most a person can aspire to while diluting or suppressing one’s cultural background. The pressure to conform is present across all levels and contexts where, in order to succeed, people must try to be more like the dominant White majority.

In comparison, in the Canadian context, the idea of multiculturalism was also borne in the 20th century and emerged as an object of national conversation. However, instead of supporting the cultural assimilationist views of the United States, it encouraged the appreciation of individual cultures, thus fostering ethnic diversity. This perspective intends to foster better understanding and respect across cultures by appreciating differences instead of expecting assimilation, creating a nation of proud Canadians that are free to speak their language and practice their culture. Still, the Canadian dream of multiculturalism has a long way to go until equity and respect across cultures are fully enacted in everyday life.

Think About This

Think about your own situation and experience:

- What stereotypes do you think people have about your self-identity and your cultural identity?
- Remember a time when you felt stereotyped about your culture, appearance, sex, or abilities and aptitudes. Did you feel pressure to conform to the more dominant norm? How did that make you feel?
- If you have travelled abroad, have people shared stereotypes they hold about your country of origin? What did you do in that situation?
- Take a moment to consider how stereotypes may affect people you know. People you know could be relatives, friends, co-workers, fellow students, professors, advisors, people with whom you interact.

TakeAway Points

- It is very easy to rely on stereotypes to create a mental image of other people, what they do, how they behave, how they live, and what they are like. The danger of this is that it reinforces unfair and inaccurate representations of people, ignoring that each person is an individual with their own identity and personality.
- Any of us who are constantly stereotyped may feel pressure to conform to the demands of the greater dominant society. For example, the message might be: “You may be welcome in the country, but don’t try to bring and display your cultural identity in our cities and towns.”
- People may consciously or unconsciously shed part of their cultural identity, which can have a negative effect on maintaining the original one. It should be said, however, that there is a difference between conforming to the dominant cultural norms and adapting to living and interacting across cultures. You can achieve the latter by appreciating your own and other cultures and expanding your intercultural competencies.

Try These Strategies

- Ask questions to cultural others that come from a place of curiosity instead of making assumptions about them.
- Practice suspending judgement: Take a step back and question the information in front of you: “Does this idea/statement apply to all the people from that group?” If the answer is “No,” it is likely a stereotype. Remember that there will always be exceptions to cultural observations across all groups; not everyone from a group is the same.
- Instead of asking, “Why is your last name X”? Where are you really from?” try asking, “Where is your family from?”
- You may rely on cultural generalizations (observations about a culture that are carefully and more accurately formed) instead of relying on stereotypes. For example, instead of saying, “Russian people are cold, they don’t trust outsiders,” you can say, “It may take longer to establish a close relationship with Russian people, you may first need to develop trust.”

Overcoming Biases



Tankilevitch, P. (2020). Sandwich Slice with Creamy Peanut Butter Spread. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/bread-food-sandwich-toast-5419208/>

Throughout our lives, we are constantly influenced by people (e.g., friends, family, peers, teachers, co-workers), traditional media (e.g., films, news, TV shows), social media (e.g., Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram), and single/multiple experiences of our own. Our brains are constantly absorbing all the information around us and categorizing it, creating associations that we automatically rely on. For example, when many people in North America hear “peanut butter and...” the immediate association is “jam,” as this has been part of their background.

In a similar way, our brain creates associations of people and actions or descriptions based on the input around us. This is how this annoying wiring of our brains stores links about all the information we process. Any links we create between people from different backgrounds based on what we hear, read, or see in relation to, for instance, a White woman, an Indigenous person, a South African national, a Scandinavian man, or a Vietnamese grandmother are then translated into biases, affecting the way we act, react, and the attitudes we develop toward other people.

Bias is an unsupported judgement—an automatic association in our brain that demonstrates underlying attitudes in favour or against other people. It happens outside our conscious awareness and affects how we relate to and react to others.

In other words, we all have biases, but most of the time, we are not aware of them. Taking time to understand the bias we hold about other people—those immediate associations our brain makes when we see, think about, or meet cultural others—can help us change our attitudes and what influences our decisions. The key is to be aware of what they are and to avoid relying on them. Remember: You cannot control your bias, but you can control your reaction.

Activity: Overcoming our Biases

1. [Watch this TED talk by Verna Myers on “How to overcome our biases” \(17’39”\)](#). You are encouraged to take notes that you can later come back to for your reference, but if you prefer, concentrate on watching and listening actively.
2. To follow up on what you just watched, check your overall understanding by answering the following true/false questions.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=104#h5p-10>

Think About This

- From your perspective, what were the most important takeaways from the video?
- How does any of this apply to your own experience? For example, if you are/are not a racialized person, what does this encourage you to do?
- How does this help you develop different attitudes and an appreciation for other cultures?

Activity: Implicit Bias Self-Assessment

In their talk, Myers mentions the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

1. Take the [Implicit Association Test](#); it is freely available on the site. Follow the link and click on demonstration tests. After reading the preliminary information, proceed when ready and select the test on “Race.”
2. Once you obtain your results, take a moment to think about what they mean.
 - Are you surprised by the results?
 - Why do you think you obtained those results?
 - What does this say about your biases?

Stereotypes and bias can have a deep impact on racialized groups because they perpetuate an inaccurate representation of a group without taking into consideration the individual, the context, and their experience. Ignoring the need to understand cultural others while relying on bias and stereotypes can have a detrimental effect on society because bias and stereotypes can, in fact, lead to discrimination. How does this happen?

It starts with an inaccurate belief: an imprecise idea of a group based on a single observation (stereotype). Once this belief is in our minds, our brain will create associations based on that observation (bias), which in turn will come into our minds when we see or hear about someone from a given cultural group. At this point, an idea has lodged into our minds that will affect how we perceive another group, how we relate to them, and the potential decisions we may make that can affect that group.

If stereotypes and bias are not challenged, we will continue to be prejudiced towards others, and that prejudice will ultimately continue to benefit some members of the society (the dominant group) while stigmatizing others. What follows is a series of actions that are based on prejudice. That is, discrimination based on race, place of origin, accent (or other factors) that impede advancement, promotion, access, and equal treatment. In other words, those actions become obstacles to achieve equity. What starts with an inaccurate idea or belief turns into an attitude or behaviour, resulting in actions referred to as discrimination.

What can you do? Be intentional about deconstructing stereotypes and avoid relying on them. Check your own biases, do not let them guide your actions, and take time to make relations with people from other cultural groups.

This will help you gain an understanding of their perspectives and have a more accurate idea of their cultural makeup and experiences.

Think About This

Have you ever been a victim of discrimination?

Can you think of examples in past or recent events where a person or group was discriminated against based on stereotypes, bias, preconceptions, or prejudice?

Keep that example of a situation in mind and use the following questions to guide your reflection.

For the situation you've identified, reflect on these questions:

- What happened?
- Why were they discriminated against?
- Has that stopped?
- Why or why not?
- What are you doing or what can you do to stop the cycle of relying on inaccurate assumptions turning into prejudice?

TakeAway Points

- Each one of us is biased. Being biased does not mean you are a bad person because our brains are continuously creating associations based on information around us.
- Becoming more aware of your biases and identifying them will help you avoid relying on them. Take a pause, focus on the person, not on categories. Before you assume, ask.
- You cannot control your biases, but you can control your reactions and attitudes.
- It is crucial to keep our own and others' biases in check to prevent them from turning into prejudice and discrimination.

Try These Strategies

Try these strategies based on the three suggestions in Vera Myers' TED talk:

1. Since there is no point denying we are biased, learn to recognize your biases. They may show up when we are in a troublesome or risky situation. Look for disconfirming data that proves your bias and stereotypes are wrong. Do not try to be colour blind; acknowledge and embrace difference by engaging more with cultural others.
2. Move towards people in a group from which you tend to keep your distance. Reach out, have a conversation, be more conscious and intentional about it, and make connections. It is okay to walk towards discomfort and go against stereotypes. Doing so will help you build relationships with people who are, in essence, different from you; this will help you stop being a bystander and become someone with more intercultural experience: an actor, advocate, or ally.
3. Keep in mind that people may be good, but what they say may be wrong. If you witness discrimination, try to say something, even if it is to someone you love. Break the vicious cycle that perpetuates negative attitudes from one generation to another. Doing this can help you be part of the force of change in society.

Microaggressions

Beyond ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and biases, we often hear, say, and do things that may carry a negative or derogatory meaning and are therefore understood as microaggressions.

Microaggressions are subtle, offensive comments or actions (including nonverbal expressions) generally directed at an individual or non-dominant group based on a bias or stereotype.

Through their research, psychologists Derald W. Sue and Lisa Spanierman (2020) developed a list of categories describing microaggressions that can help us understand how they appear in our interactions. As you read the summary below, think of other examples that may apply to each category.

1. **Alien in one's own land:** When people who look or are named differently from the dominant (White) culture are assumed to be foreign nationals. For example, after interviewing a candidate, someone says, "I didn't think he was Canadian-born with a name like that."
2. **Ascription of intelligence:** Assigning intelligence to a person of colour based on their race. For example, when a Black clerk does a calculation in her head to answer a question and the customer (from a different race) says, "I didn't think that you could do all that math in your head."
3. **Assumption of criminality:** A person of colour is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on their race. For example, a store owner who keeps a close eye on the Métis couple that just walked in to do their shopping.
4. **Colour blindness:** Making statements that indicate that a White person does not want to or need to acknowledge race and/or background. For example, a White patient telling his doctor, "You and I have a lot in common; you are not like other Latin people."
5. **Denial of individual racism:** A statement made when bias is denied. For example, when introducing an employee of colour to the rest of the office, the employer says, "You'll be comfortable here, in this office none of us are racist."
6. **Pathologizing cultural values or communication styles:** The notion that values and communication styles of the dominant culture are ideal. For example, the school counsellor suggesting something is wrong with a Korean student because she avoids making eye contact.
7. **Second-class citizen:** Assuming a profession, role, or identity for a person of colour or giving preferential treatment to White persons. For example, a receptionist failing to acknowledge or ignoring a person of colour until they approach the desk to ask a question.

The effect of microaggressions is real, and psychologists have compared them to "death by a thousand cuts" because these everyday slights indeed affect the victim's mental health and create a toxic environment at school, work, and even within our personal circles. Another problem with microaggressions is that, if left unchecked, they can be normalized, and the types of offences and actions can become more severe.

Activity: Identifying Microaggressions

Use the descriptions for the categories of microaggressions listed above and then look at the examples listed below. Decide to which category each set of microaggressions belongs.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=108#h5p-11>

Think about this

After completing the activity, go back and read the examples of microaggressions.

- Have you used any of these before?
- Can you recall a time when you witnessed a microaggression? What was the situation?
- How do you feel about these statements or actions now that you know more about microaggressions and their effect on people?

Dealing with Microaggressions

Consider this situation:

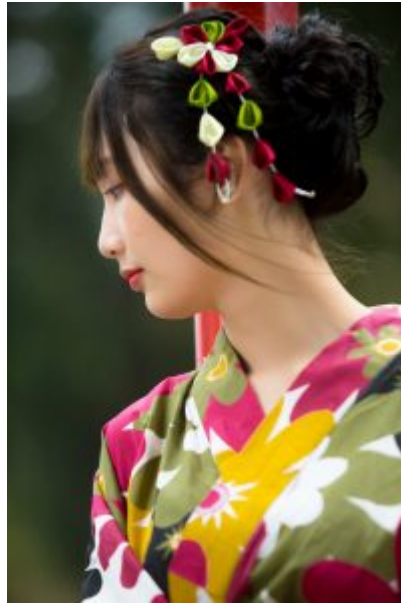
You are working on a class project with a group of peers. Everyone is from the same racial background and country except for you. After meeting together to pool all your work, one of your peers says, “Wow, you actually understood the concepts and got the work done. I’m impressed; I didn’t expect that.” The microaggression behind this interaction suggests your peer did not think of you as capable of doing the work or having a clear understanding of the ideas involved. How would you react? You have three options:

1. Ignore what your peer said; it was just a comment, it’s okay.
 2. Act defensively and show you are annoyed by the comment.
 3. Ask your peer in a conversational manner, “What did you expect?”
- The first option does not lead to a good outcome because you ignore what was said and it is likely that this sort of behaviour may be normalized, and your peer may tease you about it. You will feel uncomfortable; perhaps you will even start doubting your abilities, as others do not seem to expect you to produce what is required.
 - The second option does not have a positive outcome because it may lead to awkwardness in your interactions with the team and could even escalate the issue or affect how you work together. This may have further consequences affecting your individual performance and how you work with another group.
 - The last option is the best because you make your peer think about what they have said, probably leading them to explain what they expected from you. Asking a question also allows you to normalize that being from a different racial/cultural background does not have anything to do with your preparation and abilities.

Activity: Responding to Microaggressions

Consider the following situations. Explain what is wrong with each one and describe what you would do or say in each case:

Your Japanese roommate, Keiko, invites a (White) friend over for dinner. During the conversation, the guest asks Keiko, “Can I borrow your kimono for Halloween?”



meijii. (2019). Close-up Photo of Asian Woman in Floral Kimono Looking Away. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/close-up-photo-of-asian-woman-in-floral-kimono-looking-away-2050330>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=108#h5p-28>

A French-Canadian woman is in front of you in line at a store. She is trying to pay, but the cashier has a hard time understanding what the woman is asking. After the transaction is complete and it's your turn to pay, the cashier says to you, "They should get rid of their accent."



Wisiz, B. (2020). [Photograph of woman making a purchase]. Unsplash. https://unsplash.com/photos/q3o_8MteFM0



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=108#h5p-31>

Strategies to Deal with Microaggressions

In the situations above, you witnessed some examples of microaggressions. What are some strategies you might use to deal with them? Review the suggestions below for ideas:

Try These Strategies

- It may be possible for you to **intervene** or **respond** to a microaggression provided this is done in a safe way, considering whether the person may become defensive or agitated.
- Think about how this might affect your **relationship** with the perpetrator: what could happen if you do not respond? Would that mean you accept that behaviour or statement? Will you regret having done nothing?
- **Pay attention to the victim** of the microaggression; perhaps they make a sarcastic comment or roll their eyes to show they did not like what was said. Maybe they do not do anything and seem visibly uncomfortable or upset.
- Decide when is the best moment to take action. Is it better right when it happened or would it be best to address it later?
- **Approach the situation calmly**: you do not need to be confrontational, nor should you try to be a “saviour” for the victim.
- Engage in a conversation where you **ask questions** such as, “What do you mean by...?”
- Remember to **pay attention**: listen to what the person says and continue the conversation with questions such as, “How do you think people feel when you say that?”
- You can also choose to **be intentional**: “When I hear your comment, I feel you are not really appreciating... I wonder if you realize how that looks from this perspective.”

What About If You Are the One Committing a Microaggression?



Jordan, B. (2020). Say Sorry. Unsplash. https://unsplash.com/photos/joYk8q_An0o

If you realize you have said or done something that could have made someone uncomfortable, or you unwillingly offended someone, make sure not to let it slide. Own up to it and recognize your misstep. Things may happen at a conscious or unconscious level, but you must take steps to understand what happened and apologize; this allows you to practice understanding, grow emotionally, develop empathy, and help you become more interculturally aware.

Try These Strategies

If you realize you committed a microaggression or someone else points it out, the first thing you may feel is shock, followed by defensiveness or perhaps superficial remorse. If you find yourself in this situation, these are five steps you can take to address it:

- Take a moment to reflect on where “that” came from. You may learn something about yourself and the influences around you.
- Try to understand if this was a slip of the tongue (something that came out wrong) or if there is a more serious problem you need to address (some feelings or ideas you did not realize you had).
- Acknowledge what you did and check your biases, stereotypes, or any unconscious prejudice you hold and work towards eliminating them.
- Avoid making excuses or being defensive. Focus on genuinely talking to the other person and listening to what they have to say without interrupting them. Show empathy, validate what the other person experienced and do not apologize excessively, as this may not appear genuine.
- Appreciate the opportunity you have to change attitudes. Do not think negatively of the person who pointed out your microaggression.

TakeAway Points

- Microaggressions can take the form of verbal, nonverbal, or behavioural actions that occur at the conscious or unconscious level. They are generally directed to people from non-dominant groups based on race, place of origin, cultural background, but can also be based on sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, physical ability, and so on.
- Microaggressions can have a severe impact on people who are on the receiving end. That is, microaggressions can affect how people feel about themselves. They could feel excluded, criticized, undervalued, foreign, or even not accepted or respected. These feelings can have a detrimental effect on mental health.
- There are strategies to deal with microaggressions, whether you are a victim, perpetrator, or witness. Whatever the case, the first thing to do is to take a step back, reflect on the situation, and then decide on the best way to act.

Self-Assessment

Introduction

This module focused on helping you create awareness for others' and your own cultural self while introducing strategies to suspend judgement when you perceive people to be different from you. Through content and interactive exercises, you engaged with real-life examples that encouraged you to understand, and appreciate multiple cultural perspectives, as well as develop the skill of self-reflection, which are all important for intercultural competence development.

About the self-assessment

The following self-assessment will help you synthesize your understanding of concepts around awareness, perceptions, attitudes, the importance of developing intercultural awareness, strategies to deal with bias, stereotypes and microaggressions, and different ways of dealing with challenging intercultural situations. As you prepare to do this self-assessment, keep the following in mind:

- Engage with the self-assessment without rushing; take time to think about the questions and situations.
- Ensure you answer all questions to maximize your learning process and allow yourself to think more critically about issues and situations.
- Instead of a mark, you will receive feedback or the correct responses for each item that will support your understanding of the content.
- Enjoy completing your self-assessment! It is a great way to summarize what you did in this module.

Self-Assessment

Part 1: Understanding Concepts

Read the following statements and select the concept they are describing [7 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=116#h5p-14>

Part 2: Explaining Issues

Answer the following questions based on your understanding [15 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence?p=116#h5p-15>

Part 3: Understanding Perspectives

Decide whether the following statements are True or False [10 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence?p=116#h5p-16>

Part 4: Making Changes

How would you change the following questions or statements to make them more appropriate? [10 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence?p=116#h5p-29>

Part 5: Practical Applications

Read the following situations and identify the issue with the question, statement or attitude. Then, describe the strategy you would use to deal with the situation [18 points].

1. You and your partner, both professionals, just moved to the country and rented an apartment in the centre of the city. The landlord comes around to give you another set of keys, and he asks jokingly, referring to both of you, “Am I going to be harbouring illegal aliens?”



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence?p=116#h5p-18>

2. You and a group of friends go out for dinner and have a good time together. Everyone is enjoying themselves. Amidst the conversation, one of your White friends says to your Black friend, “You are not like other Black people.”



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=116#h5p-19>

3. An Inuk student in your class is talking to you and a fellow classmate about their experience at the mall where shop clerks kept following them around while browsing. Your classmate says, “I’m sure you imagined it, I’ve never seen that happening.”



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=116#h5p-20>

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Further Resources and References

Further Resources

Jasper, S. (2018, January 12). *H&M—blatant racism or a crass lack of (inter)cultural competence?* A Pond Apart. <https://apondapart.com/intercultural-competence>

- This article discusses examples of how the lack of intercultural competence (cultural awareness and sensitivity) within important companies such as H&M, Dove, Nivea during business and marketing processes resulted in racist advertisements (un)intentionally portraying the superiority of White over Black people.

Nadal K. L. (2014). A guide to responding to microaggressions. *CUNY FORUM*, 2(1), 71-76. Retrieved from https://archive.advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/ELAMICRO%20A_Guide_to_Responding_to_Microaggressions.pdf

- This article provides a summary guide to respond to microaggression. It explains three types of microaggression (microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations), provides examples of different microaggressions, and explains how and when to respond to these microaggressions.

TEDx Talks. (2019, May 13). *It's time to re-imagine Canada's 'nice' identity | Riley Yesno | TEDxUofT* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZih64Z2wxQ>

- In this talk (18'36"), Riley reflects on the dominant perceptions of Canadian identity to challenge us to think critically about the accuracy in the identities created. She presents examples of the inequity found among Indigenous populations (and immigrant communities) in Indigenous women. Riley Yesno is an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto, a former member of the Prime Minister's Youth Council, and an Indigenous Rights advocate.

Wisconsin Technical College System [WTCSystem]. (2020, May 26). *Responding to microaggressions* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrCgBL0MxTQ>

- This brief video (2'48") defines microaggressions and presents 3 strategies for responding when they occur. It also offers examples of microaggressions and self-reflection questions we can use to analyze assumptions that lead to microaggressions.

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Module 2: Expanding Your Intercultural Knowledge

About This Module

This module is focused on helping you deepen your knowledge and understanding of culture and how it influences interactions between people from the same or different cultures. You will explore values as indicators of cultural tendencies, gain an understanding of how cultural orientations are used to explain general tendencies across cultures, and you will learn about the role of nonverbal communication in intercultural contexts. This module encourages you to develop a global perspective while identifying ways to expand your knowledge about other cultures through engagement, relatability, and intentionality.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- understand the influence of culture in everyday behaviours and interactions
- identify at least three potential issues arising from contrasting value orientations
- explain potential difficulties involving nonverbal behaviour in varying contexts and provide suggestions for a positive outcome
- identify at least two strategies to expand your knowledge of global issues

Keywords

You can refer to the glossary at any time to find definitions of these and other keywords:

Cultural universals, Intercultural knowledge, Cultural values, Cultural orientations, Nonverbal communication

Setting the Scene

ka-kí-kiskéyihétan óma, namoya kinwés maka aciyowés pohko óta óta ka-hayayak wasétam askihk, ékwa ka-kakwéy miskétan kiskéyihamowin, iyinisiwin, kistéyitowin, mina nánisitotatowin kakiya ayisiniwak, ékosi óma kakiya ka-wahkotowak.

Realize that we as human beings have been put on this earth for only a short time and that we must use this time to gain wisdom, knowledge, respect, and the understanding for all human beings, since we are all related.

Cree (First Nations) Proverb

There's no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian. What could be more absurd than the concept of an "all Canadian" boy or girl? A society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate [...] What the world should be seeking, and what in Canada we must continue to cherish, are not concepts of uniformity, but human values: compassion, love, and understanding.

Pierre Trudeau, 15th Prime Minister of Canada

It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.

Audre Lorde, American writer

Think About This

- Why is it important to extend our knowledge of other cultures?
 - Is there any downside to that?
- What are the benefits of intentionally learning about values, ways of being, and ways of behaving across cultures?

How Interculturally Competent Are You?

Intercultural competence involves awareness of self and other cultures, knowledge of cultures beyond surface elements (e.g., music, dance, language, food, or traditions), the ability to change perspectives and attitudes, the capacity to identify unjust actions and behaviours, the intentionality to learn from experience and about other people's experiences, and the development of skills to help individuals adapt to situations and be more effective and respectful when interacting across cultures.

One may hear people affirm they are already culturally competent, that they have intercultural experience, and that they are intercultural successful, but intercultural competence is not about attaining a level, a mark, or passing a test that shows you are ready for intercultural interactions. Rather, it is a lifelong process wherein you continue to have opportunities to gain knowledge and develop skills and embrace the opportunities you have for immersing yourself in different cultural contexts at home and abroad.

Activity: Intercultural Competence



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=639#h5p-36>

- Can you identify with at least one of these statements?
- Have you heard other people say any of them?
- Do you believe this/these experience(s) make you intercultural competent? Why?

2. Take a closer look at the statements and consider how they may reflect your own experience. As you read the feedback provided on the back of each card, consider how each of these experiences or perspectives could be better used to expand your intercultural knowledge or what you could do *now* to help you appreciate other people's perspectives. [Statements 1-7 are from C. Lantz-Deaton and I. Golubeva (2020), pp. 11-17.]



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=639#h5p-37>

Think about this

- Based on the feedback provided for each statement, what do you think you need to do to truly learn about other cultural groups?
- How can you engage more meaningfully with peers and people in Canada and abroad?

Takeaway points

- Intercultural experiences can happen in different ways while you are at home or when you travel abroad. However, having those experiences does not mean you gain extensive knowledge and skills to help you in intercultural situations.
- Any of the intercultural interactions you may have had are valuable, but you must ensure that this is not a one-time, one-person engagement. To be truly intercultural means to continuously learn and engage with people across cultures and levels of diversity.

Try these strategies

- Go back and look at the answers you selected for this activity. Based on what you now understand after reading the feedback, think about what you could have done to have more meaningful interactions with peers, friends, family, and others.
- Think about how you can use your past experiences to inform your current and future interactions. Focus on how you can learn about the cultures of people you know.
- Think about one or two actions you can take—something you can do now to learn about other people's cultures—and try one of them in the next two days.

Media Attributions

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Intercultural Knowledge

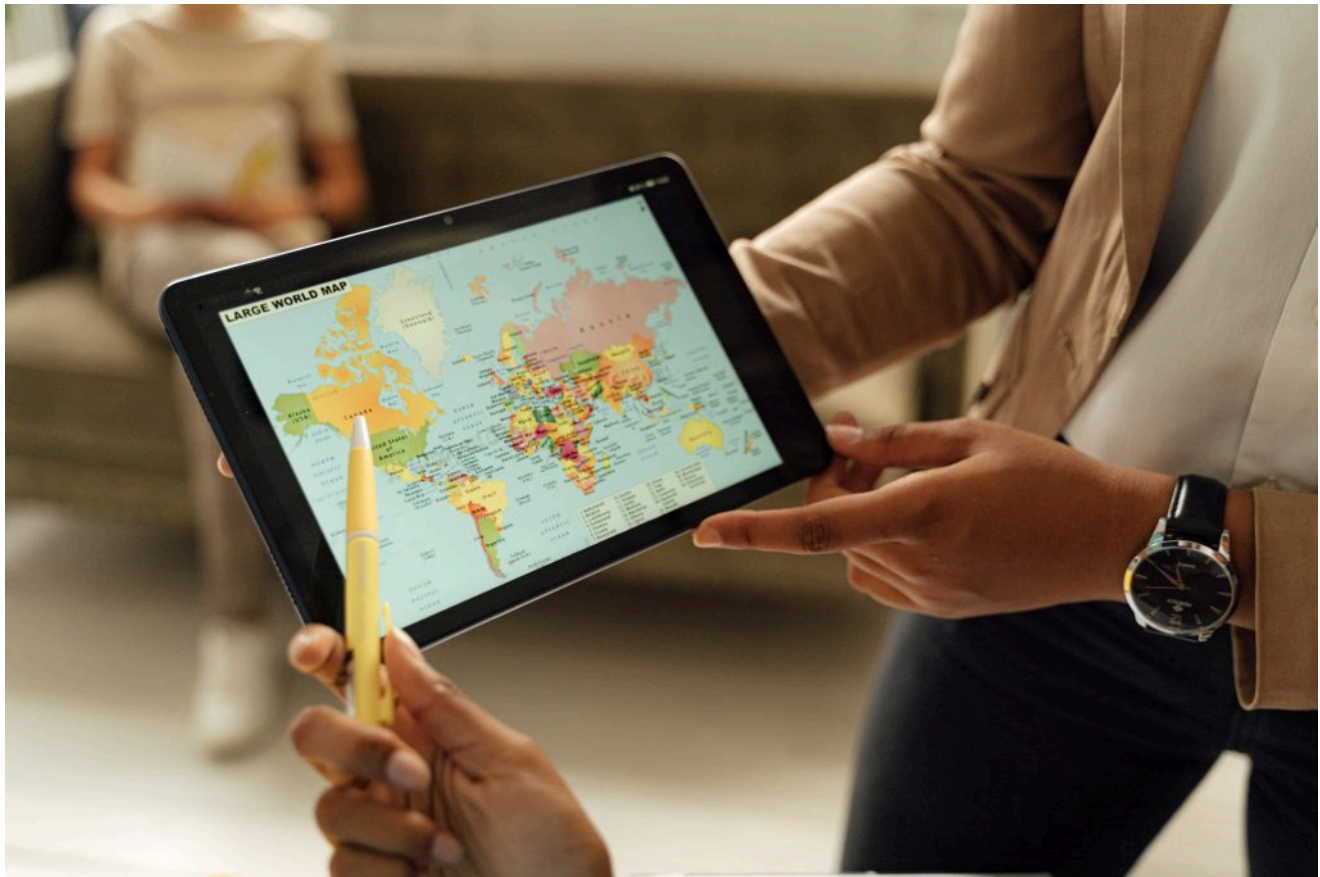
Expanding intercultural knowledge involves learning more in depth about other cultures to understand, for example, how people think, what is important to them, why they behave in a certain way given a certain situation, and what efficient communication looks like.

Intercultural knowledge can be defined as “a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennet, 2008, p. 97).

There are different ways to expand intercultural knowledge that include awareness of your own culture (e.g., your attitudes, values, expectations, and behaviours), learning about other cultures (e.g., traditions, values, ways of being, and perspectives on an issue), sociolinguistic knowledge (e.g., how culture influences language and communication styles), and having a better grasp of global and local contexts (e.g., politics, history, economics, what is happening in other places, and how an issue is addressed).

Activity: Intercultural Knowledge Self-assessment

How much do you know about other cultures around the globe? Take the short quiz, [Test your knowledge of cultures around the world!](#) to help you think about types of intercultural knowledge. Each of the prompts in the quiz refers to a general observation or tendency: something that is commonly done in a country with possible exceptions. Make sure to carefully read the feedback provided for each question. If you make mistakes, you can go back and try again!



Shkraba, A. (2020). Close-Up Photo of a Person Holding a Tablet Computer Showing the World Map. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/close-up-photo-of-a-person-holding-a-tablet-computer-showing-the-world-map-5306430/>

Takeaway points

- It is important to continuously seek to expand our cultural knowledge because we are not isolated beings. We are in constant interaction with (culturally) diverse individuals at home (e.g., teachers, neighbours, store clerks, service workers, friends, international peers, and family) and abroad (when travelling for study, work, leisure, moving abroad, visiting family, etc.).
- Expanding one's intercultural learning does not take a great effort, but must go beyond "surface" cultural elements that we perceive with our senses. This will allow you to gain a better understanding of the "how" and "why" of behaviours and values of people from different cultures.

Try These Strategies

- To expand your knowledge, pay attention to people: listen, ask, and also converse with others about things that you cannot see. Be ready to share about your own culture and perspectives, but focus mainly on listening to other people's explanations and experiences.
- Focus on the interaction. Do not expect people to be able to explain everything there is to know about their culture, experiences, or perspectives. It is not about "educating" each other, but about learning through engagement.

Cultural Universals

What elements are common across all cultures? What are things that everybody needs or does regardless of their background? Independently of our background, there are everyday activities, values, and cultural expressions that are present across cultures. We all share commonalities, known as *cultural universals*; the differences emerge in how we express them. In other words, when they become culture-specific.

Cultural universals are human activities, organizational patterns, characteristics, or traits that are common to all societies around the world.

To understand the difference between a cultural universal and a culture-specific activity, consider this example discussing the **family unit**:

“Every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live together in one household. In these cultures, young adults will continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse’s household, or they may remain and raise their nuclear family within the extended family’s homestead. In many Western countries, by contrast, individuals are [generally] expected to leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit consisting of parents and their offspring.”

Little, 2014, pg. 82

Learning to distinguish between a cultural universal (e.g., family structure and sexual reproduction) and socio-cultural characteristics associated with a group or subgroup (e.g., nuclear vs extended families, same sex or different sex parents) will help you gain a better idea of how behaviours, values, and knowledge are defined within a given culture and across cultures.

Activity: Identifying Cultural Universals

Look at the items in the following list and classify the elements into cultural universals (elements present in all cultures) or culture-specific attributes (behaviours specific to certain cultures):



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=658#h5p-38>

To expand your knowledge of human activities and traits present around the world, explore the following list of cultural universals. As you read, it may be useful to think about how any of these examples may be expressed in different cultures based on your own cultural background and what you know about other cultural groups. For example, in mainstream North American cultures, wearing black is common during funeral rites, whereas in some Eastern countries, the colour associated with these rites is white.

- age-grading
- courtship

- etiquette
- food taboos
- gift-giving
- hospitality
- incest taboos
- language
- mealtimes
- postnatal care
- soul concepts
- trade
- community organization
- decorative art
- faith healing
- funeral rites
- government
- housing
- inheritance rules
- law
- obstetrics
- religious ritual
- surgery
- cooperative labour
- division of labour
- fire-making
- games
- greetings
- humour
- kin groups

- magic
- penal sanctions
- sexual restrictions
- technology
- cosmology
- ethnobotany
- family feasting
- gestures to communicate
- hairstyles
- hygiene
- kinship nomenclature
- marriage
- personal names
- shelter
- tool making

Takeaway points

- Cultural universals involve practices, activities, and behaviours that all societies have developed to meet their human needs or to adapt to their surroundings.
- Remember, cultural universals refer to *what we have in common as human beings*, while *culture-specific behaviours indicate how* those elements are expressed within and across cultural groups. That is the difference between, for example, hospitality (cultural universal) and rules and expectations about being a good host (culture-specific practices).

Try These Strategies

- Think about people you know with a cultural background different from yours and select two cultural universals, based on what you know or have observed. How do the culture-specific expressions differ? In what way are they similar? Do you know enough to explain this to someone else?
- If you do not know enough about the other culture, take this as an opportunity to start the conversation with your friends or acquaintances and learn more about each other. If you have the opportunity to travel abroad, you can also do this to start engaging with people in the country. Focus on observing, asking, and interacting.

Values as Cultural Lenses

We start learning values from childhood and, as we grow into adulthood, values continue to pervade our lives and create meaning in different contexts. For example, as children, we may learn to respect our parents. As teenagers, we learn rules about what is appropriate when interacting with friends. Then, as adults, we learn about levels of formality and expectations from us as employees.

Cultural values are deeply held beliefs that we rely on to determine what is “good, right, acceptable, and desirable” and what is “bad, wrong, unacceptable, and undesirable.”

We constantly see what is around us (e.g., events, behaviours, attitudes, actions, reactions, and values) through our own cultural lenses; this is what makes sense for us. However, when we notice a different way of doing things outside of what we know to be correct, we often interpret the behaviour as wrong, inappropriate, or offensive. **If we take the time to “change” our cultural lenses** and view things from the perspective of other people or groups, we will realize that they are **also following the rules of what is considered right through their own cultural lenses.**



Tsukata, R. (2020). Trendy Sunglasses Placed on Wooden Table. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/trendy-sunglasses-placed-on-wooden-table-5472304/>

As we interact with people, we have opportunities to expand our knowledge and gain an understanding of

others' outlooks and ways of being. We can then use what we have learned to try to see things through other people's cultural perspectives. It is important to remember that the different lenses you use are not limited to people from a different culture, this is also applicable to understand values, history, and experiences of people around you, including second generation immigrants, Indigenous groups, racialized individuals, as well as Black, White, Asian people, and so on. In addition, we make further adjustments to our lenses when we consider the intersectionality of our identities, including socioeconomic background, education, gender, and sexual orientation, among others, where we belong to different subgroups that make up who we are as individuals. Being able to change our perspectives across intercultural and intersectional lines allows us to develop a better understanding of perspectives from our own and other people's standpoints, further paving the way to gain knowledge about complex issues.

Activity: Adjusting Cultural Lenses



Sees, E. (2019). Round Mirror. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/round-mirror-2853432/>

Watch the TED talk by [Julien S. Bourrelle: Learn a new culture](#) (13'19"). Bourrelle is a Canadian engineer who learned to adjust his cultural lenses as he interacted with people in the countries where he lived. As you watch, think about your own experiences in situations where you did not understand what happened—where people reacted in a way you did not expect—and how you can adapt your own perspective to gain knowledge while engaging more successfully with others. You are encouraged to take notes you can later refer to, or simply focus on listening to the speaker while thinking about how the content applies to you.

Based on Bourrelle's talk, select the best answer to the question:



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An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=667#h5p-40>

Think about this

- Why is it important for us to learn how to adapt to different situations?
- Based on your own experience, when would things have gone better if you had taken the time to adjust your cultural lenses? Why? What happened?
- What about looking from a different cultural perspective? When do you think it would have been better if someone treated you differently or understood you in a different way?
- What happens when you only look at other people through your own lenses? What are you missing out on? What problems may arise?

Values are complex and differ from one culture to another within groups, organizations, universities, towns, neighbourhoods, and so on. At any one time, we follow several sets of values that reflect who we are as cultural beings and as members of a society. In addition, people also hold a set of personal values that drive their thinking and way of being. It is important to distinguish between *cultural values*, based on group tendencies, and *personal values*, based on what is important to you and what drives or influences your decisions.

Activity: Your Value Orientations

Are you aware of your value orientations? Read the following statements and reflect on your own upbringing and what you learned from, for example, your parents, grandparents, and teachers. Which of the options better reflects what you were taught as you were growing up? Note that there are no right or wrong answers; this activity is intended to help you reflect on your values and what is important to you before you seek to better understand other people's value orientations.

[Adapted from Stringer, D., & Cassiday, P. (2003). *52 activities for exploring values differences*. Intercultural Press. pp. 35-36, 43.]



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=667#h5p-41>

Think About This

- Where did these values or ways of thinking come from?
- Are they common within your cultural group? Are they common in the place where you study or work? Are they personal values?
- If more than one option makes sense to you, could it be that you are coming from a bi- or multicultural

background?

- Reflecting back on what you were taught, how is that different from the way you think and feel now? Why is that?

The values by which we live are not limited to what we learned as part of our cultural socialization. They also include organizational (e.g., university or workplace) and personal values. Although culture is the driving factor for our behaviours, remember that personality, experiences, and the context of situations also play an important role in our interactions and ways of being.

Takeaway points

- Cultural values reflect what we have learned since childhood that determines our understanding of right and wrong.
- Cultural values are better appreciated if we use different lenses—if we try to make sense of the world by looking at things from a different perspective. Consider an example where a man kisses a woman twice on the cheeks to greet her. Depending on the cultural lenses we wear, this could be considered the right and expected thing to do (from the man's cultural perspective, this may be the common form of greeting), or it could seem inappropriate (if this is not part of the woman's cultural background, she may feel her space has been invaded or she may feel uncomfortable with a touching behaviour not permitted for religious reasons).
- We belong to many different groups simultaneously, and we have a set of values that reflect our intersectional identities.

Try These Strategies

- Pay attention to people around you, in particular when you are in an intercultural, diverse, or international context. Focus on developing your observation skills anywhere and at any time. Consider how people act and react, for example, when others buy coffee, stand in line, walk on the street, or greet each other.
- Try to be objective instead of judging what you see: Describe before you interpret. Remember, you are looking at actions through your own cultural lenses. Consider how things may look from another person's perspective. Put yourself in their place.
- Always leave room for interpretation: Could the values at hand reflect a cultural group, an organization, the person's own values?

Learning About Cultural Values



Raymond, N. (2013). Nunavut Grunge Flag. Flickr.
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How much do you know about the Inuit people of Canada? Where do they live? What is their history? What is important for them in life? What are their struggles and challenges? Where have you learned about them? NOTE: *Inuit* means *people* and refers to the whole group, the community; *Inuk* refers to a single person; *Inuktitut* is the language of the Inuit.

Activity: Cultural Values

[Visit the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada](#) and spend about 5-7 minutes (or more if you wish) browsing through the site to learn more about the Inuit of Canada.



Noahedit. (2020). Inuit languages and dialects. Wikimedia. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Inuit_languages_and_dialects.svg licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

Next, visit

[“The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture”](#)

[a pdf which opens in a new window] produced by Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (2006) to introduce and help readers understand the cultural foundations of the modern Inuit. Take this opportunity to learn about the Inuit people. Spend about 5 minutes browsing through the pages. As you do this, think about the following:

- What activities, behaviours, or perspectives do you have in common?
- What aspects of their lives are different from your own experience?
- What is something you did not know about the Inuit or perhaps found interesting?



GRID-Arendal. (2013). Inuit woman carrying her child, Clyde River, Nunavut Canada. Flickr. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gridarendal/31247360974> licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Read the section on “Traditional Inuit values” on pages 31-40 of “The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture” and answer the True/False questions that follow.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=672#h5p-42>

Think About This

- What was something you learned about the Inuit that was surprising or interesting?
- Which of the Inuit values resonate with your own? With which would you feel more comfortable?
- Which values may require an adaptation when you connect with Inuit people?
- What challenges could emerge from your interactions with Inuit persons?

Takeaway points

- Cultural values explain much of what happens in interactions where we feel things are “out of place” or where we feel “lost” because we do not understand what drives behaviours or ways of thinking.
- Value systems across cultural groups will incorporate elements with which you may identify, as well as those you will need to learn about.

Try This Strategy

It is likely that there are cultural groups or subgroups within your own country that you know little about. These could be in your immediate vicinity, neighbourhood, community, city, or province. They could speak, for example, English, French, Russian, Turkish, Cantonese, or Swahili. Take time to read about these groups from different perspectives, using different sources that include (particularly) an insider and also an outsider perspective. Use that information to gain knowledge and remember to be wary of sources that rely on profiles that may unfairly describe people.

Cultural Orientations

Cultural orientations or dimensions refer to generalizations or archetypes that allow us to study the **general tendencies** of a cultural group. This is helpful when we are trying to understand how most people in a cultural group *tend* to act or *tend* to think. By approaching generalizations in this way, we avoid creating stereotypes.

Studying cultural orientations will help you expand your knowledge and make more sense of how other people may think and others' potential reasons for acting in a certain way. Remember that it is not about identifying what is the right or wrong way of behaving; it is about **how we understand each other across cultures**.

The following cultural orientations are informed by the work of Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner (orientations 1-5 and 7), and Edward T. Hall (orientations 6 and 8). These orientations combine values, behaviours, and attitudes to create dimensions that help us explain and understand generalizations across cultural groups.

1. Individualism vs communitarianism
2. Universalism vs particularism
3. Task (specific) vs relationship (diffuse)
4. Achievement (egalitarian) vs ascription (hierarchy)
5. Affective vs neutral
6. Sequential time (monochronic) vs synchronous time (polychronic)
7. Internal direction vs external direction
8. Low context vs high context

As you explore these cultural orientations, keep in mind that:

- These explain cultural **tendencies** and not inflexible descriptions or overgeneralizations (stereotypes).
- There will always be **exceptions** because our complete outlook is shaped by our background, experiences, and interactions.
- These dimensions **do not favour** one orientation style over another; it is not about a right way or wrong way of doing things.
- The dimensions are about **understanding** the ways people move along different value spectrums.

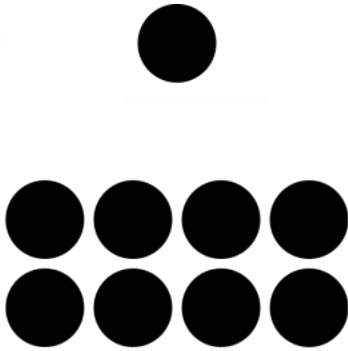
Individualism vs communitarianism

What is this about?

How do we see ourselves in relation to others?

Explanation

Individualism



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- People value personal freedom and achievement
- Quick decision making, one person, on the spot
- Place great importance on being able to care for oneself
- Vacations often in pairs or on your own

Communitarianism / Collectivism



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- People value consensus when making a decision
- The group comes before individual needs
- The group provides help and safety in exchange for loyalty
- Vacations often in groups or with extended family

How does this look in context?

Activity: Individualism vs Communitarianism

Can you identify the value orientations in these statements? [Statements adapted from Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020, p. 39]



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-43>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-44>

[Print out the worksheet How I Understand Myself Based on Cultural Orientations \[a link to a Word document\]](#) or on a piece of paper draw a horizontal line and mark the middle with an X or a vertical line. On each side, write “individualism” and “communitarianism” as shown below. Based on what you have learned, with what orientation do you feel more affinity? Do you feel your outlook and way of being and behaving are closer to one more than the other? Does it have elements of both? Where do you find yourself most of the time?

Mark with an “X” or a dot where you see yourself in relation to these orientations and, on the margins, write one or two examples of influences you had that moved you towards that orientation: for example, your background, family, education, type of work, organization, life experience, and so on.

Individualism _____|_____ Communitarianism

Save the sheet, you will use it later.



Universalism vs Particularism

What is this about?

How do we define what is fair?

Explanation

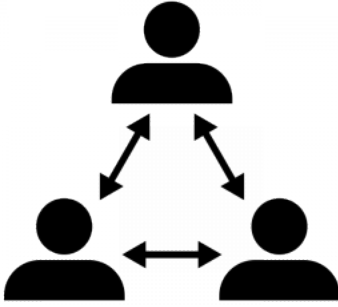
Universalism



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- People place high importance on laws, rules, values and obligations
- Focus on dealing fairly with people based on these rules
- Rules come before relationships

Particularism



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- People believe that circumstances and relationships dictate the rules we follow
- How people respond to a situation may be based on the context, what is happening, and the people involved

How does this look in context?

Activity: Universalism vs Particularism

Read each situation carefully and then reflect on the questions that follow. Focus on which position you would take and how this may look from another person's perspective, then write a short explanation of your position based on the questions asked.

Situation 1

An international student from India at a university in Switzerland approaches his professor to ask if it would be possible to submit an assignment a bit later since he just started working on it. The professor politely explains that it is not possible to offer an extension because that would be unfair to the rest of the students. The student highlights how well he is doing in the class, how much he participates, and the good relationship he has with the professor. As a reply, the professor explains that although he is a brilliant student and they have a good relationship, this does not mean the rules can be bent in the student's favour.

[Examples adapted from Moser, 2021]



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-45>

Situation 2

You are riding in a car driven by a close friend when he hits a pedestrian. You know he was going at least 60 km/h where the maximum allowed speed is 30 km/h. There are no witnesses. His lawyer says that if you testify under oath that he was only driving 30 km/h, it may save him from serious consequences.

[Examples adapted from Moser, 2021]



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-46>

Studies have shown that when presented with similar cultural dilemmas, people from Switzerland, Canada,

the USA, and Scandinavian countries generally lean on the importance to follow and abide by rules to create consistency and fairness. People in countries such as Venezuela, South Korea, Russia, and China generally pause to think about how fairness could be interpreted depending on the situation presented. These differences do not mean that certain people may or may not follow rules based on their culture, it means that we consider different things when defining *what is fair*.

Indicate on the worksheet where you see yourself in relation to these orientations. Write one or two examples of influences you have had that helped you move you towards that orientation.

Universalism _____|_____ Particularism

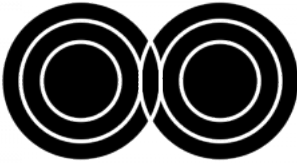
Task (specific) vs Relationship (diffuse)

What is this about?

How do we get things done? How far do we get involved?

Explanation

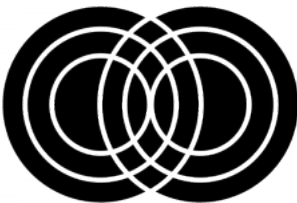
Task (specific)



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- Work and personal life are separate so that relationships do not impact objectives
- People can work together even if they do not have a good, close relationship
- Focus is on the destination

Relationship (diffuse)



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- There is overlap between work and personal life, as good relationships are vital to achieving objectives
- People tend to spend time outside work hours with peers; private and public flow into each other

- Focus is on the journey

How does this look in context?

Activity: Task vs Relationship

Which of the following are examples of task or relationship orientations?



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-47>

Remember that when it comes to cultural orientations you do not “belong” to either one or the other. You may have general leanings towards one when you consider everything you do. However, you may still have elements of the other orientation based on what works best within your culture, your organization, and your personal life. As an example, if you work on a project with peers from Germany and Peru, it is very likely that the German nationals will emphasize the need for clear roles, instructions, and processes before spending time learning more about other people in the team. Conversely, your Peruvian peers may be more comfortable focusing on building a relationship, taking time to talk about each other, before you focus on project work. In this case, the key is to find a balance that works for everyone.

Indicate on the worksheet where you see yourself in relation to these orientations. Write one or two examples of influences you have had that helped you move you towards that orientation.

Task (specific) _____ | _____ Relationship (diffuse)

Achievement (egalitarian) vs Ascription (hierarchical)

What is this about?

How do we view status and hierarchy? Do we have to prove ourselves to receive status or is it given to us?

Explanation

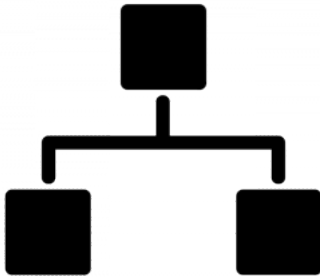
Achievement (egalitarian)



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- Status is not as important, what matters is your performance, no matter who you are
- You are what you do and what you have achieved

Ascription (hierarchy)



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- Status is important, and you should be valued for who you are
- Power, title, and position are recognized and often define behaviours and relationships
- Roles define behaviour

How does this look in context?

Activity: Achievement vs Ascription

Consider the following situations carefully and then reflect on the questions that follow. Focus on how you feel within the context of each situation and reflect on how you would react to or deal with the different ways of engaging in each meeting.

Situation 1 – Achievement (egalitarian)

You obtain your degree and are then offered a job in Denmark that corresponds with your qualifications and competence. When invited to discuss issues in a meeting, you notice that anyone, from the student intern to the VP, can participate or challenge decisions because everyone has the competence and/or capacity to do so.

Think about this

- How comfortable do you feel engaging in this way?
- Would you prefer to have the person with a higher-ranked position or more seniority lead the decision-making?
- How comfortable would you be challenging something that you disagree with?

Situation 2 – Ascription (hierarchy)

Examples adapted from Moser, 2021

You obtain your degree and are offered a job in Dubai that clearly reflects your qualifications and experience. During meetings, you notice you are encouraged to speak out, but only if you correspond with your peer in terms of seniority, gender, or social status.

Think about this

- How comfortable do you feel engaging in this way?
- Would you prefer to be able to voice your thoughts regardless of who the other people in the meeting might be?
- How comfortable would you be challenging something that you disagree with?

It may be useful to think about the way you were raised—what your parents and professors expected from you. For example, if you were expected to always obey your parents without question, to refrain from interrupting professors in class, and to use titles when referring to your teachers (e.g., Dr. Lee or Prof Johnson), it is likely you

are more comfortable with what constitutes an ascription orientation (often observed in people from India, China, and Japan). Conversely, if you are encouraged to voice your ideas, regardless of your gender or background, even if they seem to be against what your parents or professors think, and are comfortable calling your teachers by their first names (e.g., Allina or George), you may be leaning towards an achievement orientation (commonly seen in Canada and the United States).

Indicate on the worksheet where you see yourself in relation to these orientations. Write one or two examples of influences you have had that helped you move you towards that orientation.

Achievement (egalitarian) _____|_____ Ascription (hierarchy)

Affective vs Neutral

What is this about?

How do we express emotions? How do we manage them?

Explanation

Affective (emotional)



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- Express emotions freely, spontaneously in public and private, at work, in the classroom, or in social situations
- Reveal thoughts and feelings verbally and nonverbally (it shows on the face)
- Showing emotion is accepted and even expected
- Behaviour and engagement are expressive
- Hiding emotions may be considered dishonest

Neutral




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- Discourage revealing emotions too quickly to people with whom we are not close
- Being neutral is considered professional
- Lack of emotional tone is preferred
- Reason influences actions more than feelings
- People may not reveal what they are thinking or how they are feeling

How does this look in context?

Activity: Affective vs Neutral



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-48>

Think about this

- How comfortable do you feel expressing your emotions when you are with family? Is it the same when you are at university or at work?
- How do you perceive people that seem to keep emotions to themselves? What about people who have no problem displaying them?
- What stereotypes do you think you created based on this? How can you reinterpret that?

Research identifies people from Scandinavia, Russia, and South Korea as having the tendency to control their emotions when in public contexts. In contrast, many people from Latin America, Southern Italy, and most Middle Eastern countries seem to have a tendency to express their emotions more freely.

In addition to cultural orientations, personalities and the context of the situation also affect how people react, whether we are comfortable showing our feelings or trying to maintain a neutral exterior. Furthermore, cultures cannot be one or the other. The amount of visible emoting (the ease with which we display our feelings) differs greatly across cultures and, just as it happens with any other orientation, all actions, reactions, and interactions will be influenced by factors other than cultural tendencies.

Indicate on the worksheet where you see yourself in relation to these orientations. Write one or two examples of influences you have had that helped you move you towards that orientation.

Affective _____|_____ Neutral

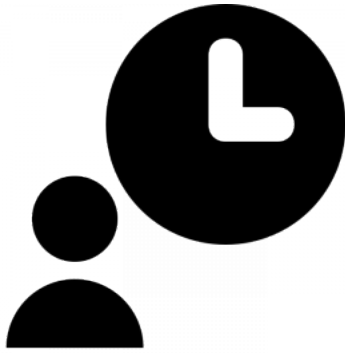
Sequential time (monochronic) vs synchronous time (polychronic)

What is this about?

How do we define and approach time?

Explanation

Sequential time (monochronic)



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- High value on punctuality, sticking to the plan, and planning
- Being late is considered disrespectful
- People like events to happen in order
- Preference for focusing on one thing at a time, focusing on the big picture

Synchronous time (polychronic)



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- Plans and commitments are flexible
- Being late is not a sign of disrespect
- People see past, present, and future as interrelated
- People may work on several projects at once

How does this look in context?

Activity: Monochronic vs Polychronic

Can you decide what time orientation is illustrated in the following situations?



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-49>

The sequential time/monochronic orientation has often been observed in countries like Germany, Switzerland,

Canada, and England. While the synchronous time/polychronic orientation seems to be common in countries like India, Colombia, French Polynesia, and Nigeria. It is important to remember that in addition to the overall tendencies towards one or another way to construct time, there will be variations across countries.

An important note about past-present-future orientations:

How we orient ourselves with regards to time goes beyond what is considered being punctual and our preference for focusing on one or several projects at the same time. How we regard time affects our outlook, where we look to identify goals, what is important for us to preserve or change, and what we consider when planning for the future. For example:

- Métis, Inuit, and First Nations people of Canada tend to place high importance on oral history, origin of the family, traditional values, and respect shown for ancestors and older people. This is understood as a time orientation towards the **past**. In varying degrees, this tendency is also found among people from China, England, Japan, and most Latin American countries.
- Considering the past as passed and the future as uncertain allows people to place greater importance on the “here and now,” focusing on short-term benefits and immediate results, allowing things to flow. This tendency is described as a **present** orientation and has been observed in some African countries.
- Cultural groups that centre their efforts on future planning, constantly strategizing, making changes that will provide benefits in the long term, and focus on the bigger picture and ways to achieve those goals are considered as oriented toward the **future**. This tendency is often seen in people from Germany and mainstream US nationals.

Indicate on the worksheet where you see yourself in relation to these orientations. Write one or two examples of influences you have had that helped you move you towards that orientation.

Sequential time(monochronic) _____|_____ Synchronous time (polychronic)

Internal direction vs external direction

What is this about?

How do we relate to our environment?

Explanation

Internal direction



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- People believe they can control nature or their environment (where they work or study) to reach their goals
- Focus on self, own group, own organization
- The attitude is, “I master my own destiny”
- Playing tough is legitimate

- The most important thing is to achieve the objective

External direction



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- People believe that nature, or their environment (where they work or study), controls them
- Focus actions on others (peers, colleagues, partner, customer), and avoid conflict
- The attitude is, “God willing,” “Whatever will be will be”
- Must work with their environment to achieve goals
- The most important thing is to maintain the relationship

How does this look in context?

Activity: Internal vs external

Can you identify the orientations these statements refer to? [Some examples adapted from Moser, 2021]



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-50>

People in countries with a tendency for an internal orientation include Israel, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. People who often lean towards an external orientation include China, Saudi Arabia, and Spain. As with other orientations, remember that internal and external dimensions are influenced by other orientations, the situation, background, and personal experience. For example, a person may still wish another one “good luck” even if people from that culture have a strong internal orientation. Similarly, a person from a country mostly oriented towards an external orientation will still find value in some competition and will focus on achieving their goals. **People do not belong to one or another, elements of both can be found in a group or community.**

Indicate on the worksheet where you see yourself in relation to these orientations. Write one or two examples of influences you have had that helped you move you towards that orientation.

Internal direction _____|_____ External direction

Low context vs high context

What is this about?

How important is the context in communication? How much do we rely on context for communication?

Explanation

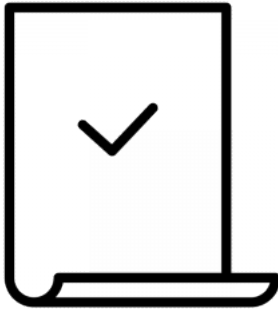
Low context



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- Communication is more explicit: The message is clearly put into words
- Clear descriptions, highly specific, no ambiguous communication
- “Say what you mean and say it clearly”
- Example: Legal contracts—all the details are clearly laid out

High context



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- Communication is more implicit: Not everything needs to be put into words
- Part of the message may be shared through nonverbal cues and silences
- “Read between the lines”
- Example: Chinese opera—symbols and movements may have a hidden meaning

How does this look in context?

Activity: Low vs. High Context

Read the following situation and then reflect on the questions that follow. Position yourself behind both perspectives and then write a couple of sentences reflecting on the questions.

Situation:

(adapted from Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020, p. 36)

At a small university in Turkey, students are given a somewhat vague verbal assignment by a lecturer to write a 10-page paper on international development that will be due sometime before the end of the term. After class,

an exchange student from Canada who has recently arrived approaches the lecturer and begins asking a lot of detailed questions: what the font size should be, if there is a word count, how many references to include, when the exact deadline is, which specific topics should be addressed, and so on. The lecturer becomes tired of all the questions and excuses themselves.

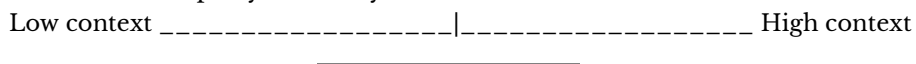


An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=679#h5p-51>

People from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, have been thought to be more high-context cultures, where there are unwritten rules and messages that cannot always be understood without background knowledge. People from countries with a low-context orientation tend to convey messages explicitly, very little is taken for granted, and the focus is on the words—the verbal message—more than on implicit messages. Countries with a low-context orientation include Canada, the United States, and most of Western Europe.

Indicate on the worksheet where you see yourself in relation to these orientations. Write one or two examples of influences you have had that helped you move you towards that orientation.



Think about this

Take a look at the worksheet you completed and reflect on your orientations as a whole.

- Are your orientations based on your cultural background, values, things that you learned as you were growing up?
- Do they reflect cultural values, organizational values, or personal values?
- How do you think you may be perceived based on this?
- What can you do to communicate your orientations?
- How does learning about cultural orientations may help you as you interact with people from other cultural groups?

Takeaway points:

- Cultural orientations help us understand different perspectives, inform our interpretation of behaviours, and can help us avoid misunderstandings. Having more extensive knowledge of values and orientations can also help us find ways to establish trust, engage with people interculturally, and make better decisions that are fair to all.
- Remember that these orientations express tendencies and help us understand how values may contrast across cultures; one must be mindful when interpreting them to avoid turning an observation of a tendency into a stereotype or an inflexible description of cultures.

Try This Strategy

- Talk to a peer or relative from your cultural group about your findings in this section. Ask them about their own orientations based on what you shared. Are there commonalities? Do you differ in any way?
- Try to do the same with a peer from a different cultural group and use this opportunity to learn about their orientations. Remember, they could be associated with cultural tendencies or express personal preferences. Take the initiative to interact with more than a couple of people from that same group, so you continue to identify tendencies while deconstructing stereotypes and learning more about them and their experiences.

Media Attributions

INDIVIDUALISM VS COMMUNITARIANISM

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AFFECTIVE VS NEUTRAL

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Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication refers to the nonvocal expressions we use to convey messages between people. We use nonverbal communication to express intention, identity, some of our cultural orientations, values, and so on. Pointing, winking, shaking hands, physical distancing, facial expressions, and so on, are examples of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal signals can be classified under different categories based on what they involve. Some examples include eye behaviour (e.g., staring, gazing, blinking, winking, avoiding eye contact), touching behaviour (e.g., hugging, patting, holding, kissing, and punching) proximity to others, facial expressions, posture, appearance and meaning of colours, head and hand movements, pauses and hesitations, and vocalizations (e.g., laughing, sighing, groaning, and shushing). Each of the nonverbal cues we utilize is culturally constructed and may follow unwritten rules. For example, laughing is a cultural universal, but the way this is expressed across cultures is different. Laughing out loud on a public bus may be acceptable in many Latin American countries, but may be seen as disruptive behaviour in Norway or England. Similarly, greeting someone with two kisses may be the common rule in Spain, but those rules may not be applied in the same way in Muslim countries where people also greet each other with two or more kisses.

Activity: Understanding Nonverbal Communication

[Watch the video Non-verbal Communication Across Cultures](#) (5'45"), where Prof Alan Jenkins discusses, in the context of business, how understanding nonverbal communication is key when interacting across cultures. Pay attention to the examples he provides.

Answer the following True / False questions based on Prof Jenkins' talk.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=887#h5p-52>

When we interact interculturally, our body language helps us get a message across and make connections, for example, through touch, closeness, eye contact, head movements, facial expressions, and gestures that indicate openness and interest in what is being said. We may not always be aware of how we come across when interacting with cultural others, therefore we are often quick to make assumptions about other people based on how we interpret **their** behaviour.

You have learned how unfair this can be. It is not that you or the other person is being disrespectful, forward, ill-intentioned, disinterested, shy, cold, or choosing to ignore your personal space; you are simply using different codes. That is, **you are each communicating nonverbally in ways that are not necessarily shared across cultures.**

There are numerous categories of nonverbal behaviours. In the following activity, we will explore gestures, personal space, and greetings to help you expand your knowledge and understanding of different ways to interpret nonverbal signals.

Gestures

Activity: Understanding Gestures

What do the following gestures mean to you? Do you know what meaning they may have in other countries? Print out the word worksheet [Nonverbal Communication – Hand Gestures](#) and write your interpretation of each gesture.

[Now watch the video The Definitions of Hand Gestures Around the World \(5'15"\)](#). As you watch, check your answers to see if you matched the meaning intended.

Think about this

- Were you able to interpret all the gestures correctly?
- Which of the interpretations came as a surprise?
- Were there any gestures that did not mean anything to you?
- Are any of these gestures offensive for you or in your culture?
- Which ones of these do you use? Which ones do you not use?

Here are further examples of nonverbal communication across different cultures. Have you ever been in a situation where any of these could have influenced the way you felt during an interaction? Can you think of a situation when you could have done something that may have made the other person uncomfortable?



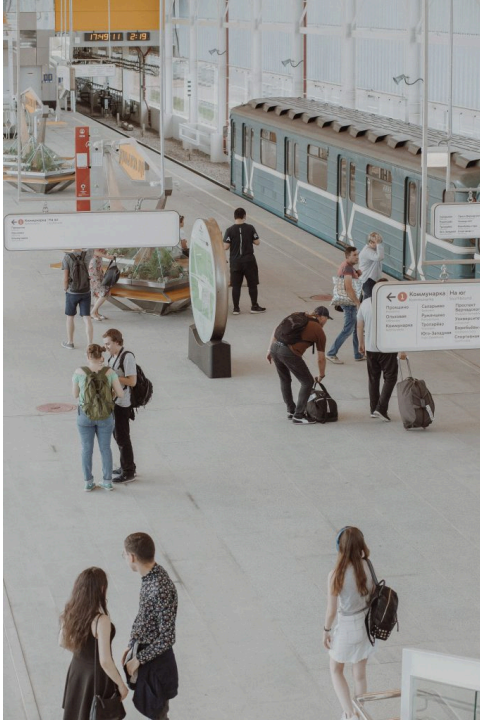
An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=887#h5p-100>

Personal Space

How big is your bubble? Consider the following situations **within the context of pre-pandemic times**. Picture them in your mind and think about what you would do, if anything.

- You are standing in line in Starbucks to buy coffee and the person behind you is so close to you that if you take a step back you will step on their toes. How would you react? Would you do anything? Would you be comfortable ignoring it and just buy your coffee?
- At the end of a lesson, your professor is gathering their materials and you approach them to ask a question about a recommended reading. As you talk, you notice the professor carefully moves away from you while still talking to you and continues to do it every time you come close. You are certain that you are being polite and not doing anything wrong, how would you interpret this?
- You are sitting on a bench outside a library having your lunch and a person of the same sex sits on the bench where you are, even though there are other vacant benches around. Would you stay in that spot to finish your lunch? Would you feel more comfortable moving to another bench?
- Look at the following images, taken during normal situations BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic. Where would you feel more comfortable? Would any of these be confusing to you? How would you feel in each situation? Would you follow the implicit rules for space you observe?



Titov, M. (2020). Unrecognizable people in subway platform near train. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/unrecognizable-people-in-subway-platform-near-train-3848896/>



Wright, W. (2019). People on Train Station. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/people-on-train-station-3412360/>



Magni, O. (2019). People Standing Outside Stores. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/people-standing-outside-stores-2877106/>



Hank, F. (2014). People waiting at bus stop. Wikimedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bus_stop#/media/File:People_waiting_at_bus_stop.jpg/ licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

It is likely that people would react in a few different ways to each of these situations, but what are the implicit rules behind your reactions? What do you need to pay attention to? Each one of us carries an invisible bubble around that is culturally constructed. We learn about the right and appropriate distance to keep in our public, social, personal, and intimate interactions during our years of socialization, and this is fully established during adolescence.

[Watch the video Cultural Proxemics. Personal Space \(7'39"\)](#), the study of space behaviour across cultures, and as you watch, try to put yourself in the situation of each of the people you see so you can think about your own possible reactions.

Space is one of the most immediate ways to create approachability or discomfort when interacting across cultures. For example, people from countries like England, Germany, and even more so those from Sweden, Finland, or Norway are likely to leave significant space when conversing or in public (e.g., waiting for the train). Comparatively, people from Canada, the US, and Australia will seem comfortable with a shorter distance, while in Italy, Spain, Greece, most of Latin America, or Africa, the distance between you and another person will likely be much shorter, potentially even involving some touch while conversing to emphasize the message or form a connection between speakers.

Greetings

How do you greet people in your family? How about friends and peers at university/work? How many ways of greeting do you know? In what situations would you use them? With whom? Based on your experience and background, when is it appropriate to hug someone? Can you apply the same rules with anyone you know? Why?

[Watch the video Greetings Around the World \(2'45"\)](#) and observe the different ways people use to greet each other, which ones would you be comfortable mirroring if a person greeted you in a different way? What do you think people convey through greetings?

Greetings serve many functions and are part of our everyday interactions. They are a way for people to recognize and show appreciation toward others (e.g., friends), to show respect (e.g., to elders, people in authority), to introduce ourselves (e.g., to people at a party, to other students and co-workers), to welcome other people, to mark the start of a class or a conference, to observe respect through protocol and social conventions, and more.

Activity: Understanding Greetings

Look at the list of countries below and decide what kind of greetings people from those countries will likely use:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=887#h5p-70>

Think about this

- Have you ever been in a situation where you did not know how to greet others?
- How about a time when you felt confused or uncomfortable because greeting did not match the other person's?

Greetings are learned behaviours, so if you make a mistake, it is okay! You can try again next time. You can learn about greeting conventions through observation and by asking people around you if you are unsure what to do. If you feel uncomfortable with any form of greeting and you are unable to reciprocate it, such as shaking hands or air kissing a person from a different sex, it may be better to explain to the other person that you are not used to their form of interaction. It is important to do so in a polite way to help others understand. If you find yourself in an intercultural situation and the other person seems uncomfortable with the way you greet them, perhaps try to explain that this is the way people commonly greet in that particular context and you want to make sure they understand and are comfortable with that. Oftentimes, it helps to wait and see if the other person initiates the greeting, then you can follow suit. It is a matter of being observant and adapting to the situation.

Takeaway points

- Most of our communication relies on nonverbal signals to emphasize, clarify, or enhance what we are saying with words. Nonverbal communication is classified into categories depending on the area they describe. For example, eye contact, head movement, facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture. We also communicate messages through colour, silence and other non-vocal sounds (e.g., grunting, sighing, and scoffing).
- Touching behaviour can be used to enhance relationships and make connections in some cultures (e.g., Brazil and Italy), whereas in other cultures, touching may be considerably reduced (e.g., England and Canada), avoided outside family and very close friends (e.g., Japan and South Korea), or considered inappropriate across different sexes (e.g., Muslim countries).

Try These Strategies

- When you are in a public place, for example, a shopping mall, or even better, at the airport, take a look

around you and pay attention to people's nonverbal behaviours. Notice the space they leave between each other. If there is any touching, how may people react if someone comes "too close"? You can also try this in an elevator or waiting room. Try to do this whenever you have the opportunity; this will help you develop your observation skills while you start to notice patterns and behaviours right in front of your eyes.

- When you are unsure of how to behave interculturally, try to let other people take the lead. Get used to adapting to differences. If you feel you have made a mistake, it is okay. We all learn by observing, trying, and asking!

Embracing Intercultural Knowledge

Expanding your intercultural knowledge can take different forms, but the key to any of them is personal engagement. No one can really learn about people's experiences and expand their thinking if this is limited to reading or hearing about other people from someone else.

The following three sections explain how you can embrace and thus expand your intercultural knowledge. Make sure to do something from each section to ensure you have different forms and sources of information and interactions.

1. Engagement

Regardless of the extent to which you can make connections, or how comfortable you feel interacting with people, you can always make the best of the opportunities you have for engagement. Here are some things you can try:



Jopwell. (2019). Group of People Near Wall. Pexels.
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-people-near-wall-2422290/>

- Reach out to people you have met before that are from different backgrounds. Have more conversations about the way they think and how they see your culture. Find out about their perceptions and preferences beyond tangible elements of culture. You may be surprised by how similar your views are, but even if they are different, remember that understanding different points of view does not equal agreement; it means you have a better idea of why people think and act in a certain way.



May, C. (2020). Glad diverse students taking notes while working on project. Pexels.

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/glad-diverse-students-taking-notes-while-working-on-project-5966011/>

- Start a conversation with students, peers, or co-workers outside of your regular circle. Perhaps they could be from a different cultural group (whether they are domestic or international peers). Remember to suspend judgement by checking your biases and stereotypes.



Nilov, M. (2021) Girl sitting at table with a book and laptop, facing away from the camera. Pexels.

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-person-woman-coffee-9158774/>

- Do not sit away from people who seem to “look” different from you because you never know what you may have in common; this is a chance you have to learn about a different way of doing things from that person. Small changes in your actions can translate to great changes in the way you engage with others and can help you deconstruct stereotypes and expand your worldview.



Kelley, L. (2017). Group of People Enjoying Music Concert. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-people-enjoying-music-concert-325521/>

- Take a look around your community. Even if it is heterogeneous, there may be people from different countries or with multicultural backgrounds. Make sure to engage with people from your own and a different group to learn about your cultural self as well as the experiences and stories of other people. You would be surprised by how enriching this experience can be for everyone.



Monstera. (2020). Diverse classmates talking to each other after studies. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/diverse-classmates-talking-to-each-other-after-studies-6238082/>

- Join a club at the university and attend cultural events open to the public. Creating these opportunities to meet people will go a long way; it does not take a great effort other than wanting to connect with others while keeping an open mind.

Activity: Engaging with others

As you consider how you engage with others, would you say the following statements are true or false?



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=899#h5p-54>

2. Relatability

Intercultural learning is not centred around differences; it is instead focused on understanding how our cultural identities interact within the same context. When we learn about other cultures, we observe similarities and differences across groups, but that is only a portion of our identity. We can relate to others based on, for example, our cultural background, opinions on issues, individual experiences, intersectional identities, and life histories.



Odintsov, R. (2021). Aerial Shot of a Bridge in a City. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/aerial-shot-of-a-bridge-in-a-city-7539822/>

- When studying a topic related to your program that really interests you, **find a way to expand your interest by looking at the topic from the perspective of another culture or country.** Take a moment to ask yourself, for example, what do engineers consider when building bridges in Guyana, Australia, or Portugal? How do people in rural areas of Guatemala see traditional versus modern medicine? How is physical activity promoted in Chinese cities? What lessons in international development can we learn from Denmark?



Artem. (2019). Woman Reading Newspaper. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-reading-newspaper-3095621/>

- Think about worldly or local events—something that is currently in the news. Focus on learning about how this looks from other perspectives and **gaining an understanding of why or how people address the issue in a similar or different way.** What does that mean for the population? How is that different from your own case? For example, consider the COVID-19 pandemic: How has this impacted rural or racialized people around you? What is the current situation in other countries? What do you know about how your East Asian friends feel when there is news of anti-Asian racism? What can you do?



Bertelli, M. (2020). Group of multiethnic people gathering around female speaker in studio. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-multiethnic-people-gathering-around-female-speaker-in-studio-3856027/>

- Reflect on the multiple layers of your identity. Perhaps there are aspects of your identity that are not easy to discuss or celebrate with people close to you. Think about how this may look for cultural others; this may be an opportunity to come together and share experiences, perspectives, seek support, and help each other thrive. Sometimes those who understand us best are not in our immediate surroundings because our views or ways of being may not agree. However, it is likely you will find other people with similar views across cultural lines; **just because someone is from a different culture does not mean they do not share a similar experience to you.**

Activity: Relating to Others

As you consider how you relate to others, would you say the following statements are true or false?



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=899#h5p-55>

3. Intentionality

It is important to make a conscious effort to observe, listen, converse, interact, learn, share, and appreciate people, their stories, and their cultural background. It is very likely you have already had opportunities to expand your intercultural knowledge, but from now on, you can be more intentional about how to approach those opportunities.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=899#h5p-56>

Activity: Being Intentional

As you consider how to be more intentional, would you say the following statements are true or false?



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=899#h5p-57>

Take away points

- There are different ways to connect and increase your intercultural knowledge.
- You can expand your intercultural knowledge through engagement, relatability, and intentionality.
- Engagement involves interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, connecting with people with whom you do not usually interact, immersing yourself deeper within the community where you live or the groups you join.
- Relatability focuses on finding what connects you to others, from intersectional to intercultural identities. In addition, you can look for ways to link what you do (study or work) with what happens in other countries around the globe as well as with people in your own town.
- Intentionality centres on making a conscious effort to share about your own culture and individual experience, learn about others, and appreciating other people's experiences. You can be intentional by developing your cognitive, affective, and behavioural competencies.
- Besides person-to-person interactions, you can also immerse yourself in other cultures through books and films, as in the examples provided ([Embracing Intercultural Knowledge – Books and Films](#)). Just remember that what you read or watch is still not the whole picture of a culture, but windows into different cultures.

Try this strategy:

In addition to learning from other people, courses, and your own experience, you can also use other sources of information. Be careful what sources you consult, as some may be unreliable. For example, a website that provides a 10-point summary of how to interact with people from South Korea, Chile, or Romania will likely reinforce stereotypes by listing descriptions of people that do not encourage deeper and more experiential learning. The following is a guide to help inform you as you explore sources for intercultural knowledge.

Poor/limited/unreliable sources	Good/expanded/reliable sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rely on simple lists of facts that are not applicable to real contexts • Do not consider history and context to explain their impact on cultural behaviours • Rely on overgeneralizations or stereotypes to describe a cultural group • Are biased in their explanations of cultural behaviours • Do not acknowledge variants or diversity of subcultures • Only list dos and don'ts with limited or no further cultural explanations • Foster negative attitudes towards members of a culture • Categorize cultures in fixed dimensions • Have an ethnocentric perspective towards other cultures • Use offensive language, negative connotations, disrespectful statements, about others • Focus only on cultural information limited to surface descriptions of culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include meaningful and authentic content • Offer strategies to facilitate a deep level of thinking • Are based on the experience of many people (tendencies) • Consider specific contexts and variants • Establish tendencies to understand behaviours • Encourage you to self-reflect on your own culture • Are often created by in-group members providing an insider perspective • Support a perspective whereby cultures are appreciated • They make you think critically • Address people's experiences and life histories • Have a more inclusive view of cultures • Emphasize learning about others and ways to engage with content and people • Problematicize the use of relying on cultural profiles or lists of dos and don'ts to gain an understanding of cultures

Self-Assessment

Introduction

This module focused on helping you deepen your knowledge and understanding of culture and how it influences interactions between people from the same and different cultures. You explored values as indicators of cultural tendencies, explored cultural orientations used to explain general tendencies across cultures, and learned about the role of nonverbal communication in intercultural contexts. This module encouraged you to develop a global perspective while identifying ways to expand your knowledge about other cultures through engagement, relatability, and intentionality.

About the self-assessment

The following self-assessment will help you demonstrate your understanding of cultural values and orientations in everyday behaviours and interactions; it will help you think about and demonstrate your ability to address potential issues arising from contrasting orientations. You will be able to explain potential difficulties in exchanges involving nonverbal communication, make suggestions about how best to react to given situations, and identify strategies to expand your knowledge of intercultural and global issues.

As you prepare to do this self-assessment, keep in mind the following:

- Engage with the self-assessment without rushing. Take time to think about the questions and situations.
- Ensure you answer all questions to maximize your learning process and allow you to think more critically about issues and situations.
- Instead of a mark, you will be able to see feedback (sample responses) for each item that will support your understanding of the content.
- Enjoy completing your self-assessment! It is a great way to summarize what you did in this module.

Self-assessment

Part 1: Understanding Concepts



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-58>

Part 2: Explaining Issues

Answer the following questions related to the content you explored in this module and provide examples as needed to demonstrate your understanding [15 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-59>

Part 3: Understanding Perspectives

Decide whether the following statements are True or False [7 points].



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-60>

Part 4: Understanding Meaning

Look at the images below and select the correct answer in each case. [7 points]



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-61>

Part 5: Practical Applications

Read the following situations and identify the cultural/value orientations involved in each case. Then answer the question addressing the situation. [24 points]

Situation 1

People from the US, Germany, and Scandinavian countries generally value performance based on how hard one works to attain goals (e.g., scholarships, honour roll, and academic status) and what one becomes; in contrast, people from Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong often place importance on who or what the person is (e.g., the authority awarded to a teacher or the boss, the respect owed to elders).



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-62>

Situation 2

Indigenous peoples of Canada often find it difficult to function within mainstream values focused on personal achievement and benefits enjoyed by one as opposed to sharing with the rest of the group. If someone offers a scholarship to the three Indigenous teens with the best marks in the class, this is seen as rewarding their individual performances and setting them aside from the rest.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-63>

Situation 3

In countries such as Austria and Denmark, it is common to find rules that are detailed and consistently applied to all so everyone is treated the same way. However, in Latin American, Middle Eastern and Sub-Saharan African countries, rules do exist, but there is a degree of flexibility to account for specific cases or scenarios. As a result, those who abide by the rules as expected are often perceived as strict and inflexible, while those who see the value of flexing the rules for some people based on their situation can often be seen as demanding and showing favouritism.



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Situation 4

Countries such as Canada, the US, Australia, and Ireland often rely on a form of communication that is explicit and direct (within different degrees) so there is no risk of confusion. Comparatively, countries such as India, Thailand, and Italy do not always/necessarily say everything with words since a great portion of the message is conveyed through tone, nonverbal signals, and often seem more indirect.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-65>

Situation 5

People from Finland, Canada, Switzerland, and Northern France tend to function better when concentrating on completing one task at a time. They stick to strategies to respect deadlines and promptness and prefer avoiding distractions. In contrast, many African, Latin American, and Native American cultures tend to appreciate some flexibility of commitments. Deadlines are set and observed, but they may be adjusted. As such, while completing tasks, there may be interruptions that they will be able to handle.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-66>

Situation 6

People often have different ways to relate to their environment and may believe that they can control what happens around them to achieve their goals, which is a tendency commonly observed in the UK. Other people may feel that they should work with what is available, avoiding conflict where possible as they focus on reaching their goals. This orientation has been observed among Chinese nationals.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-67>

Situation 7

Some cultures often discourage emotional displays in public and it may take a bit of time to comfortably reveal emotions to those with whom we are not close (e.g., Russia, Japan, and Scandinavian countries). Conversely, in some other cultures, people tend to spontaneously express their emotions in public or private, using verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., Mexico, Argentina, and Mediterranean countries).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-68>

Situation 8

If you have the opportunity to work in different countries, you will observe that people often have different ways to relate to work and the relationships around it. In some countries, the lines between the two may appear blurred (e.g., most of Latin America, Southern Europe, the Middle East, and most of Asia). In others, these lines tend to be well-defined, albeit to varying degrees (e.g., Australia, Germany, Canada, and the Netherlands).



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=914#h5p-69>

Further Resources and References

Further Resources

Comisceo Global. (2021). *Country and culture guides*. <https://www.comisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides>

- This website provides country and culture guides intended to be used as a general introduction to the diversity of countries around the world. It is NOT intended to create or reinforce stereotypes; it also provides ideas of what to do next to expand knowledge about the countries.

Billington Library. *Intercultural communication fiction: A guide to novels about cultural rifts, connections, and divisions*. <https://jccc.libguides.com/c.php?g=511242>

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- This guide serves to learn and understand traditional values, beliefs, and practices from the voices of First Nations and Métis Knowledge Keepers.

University of Ottawa. (n.d.). *Elders and traditional knowledge keepers: University of Ottawa guide to Indigenous protocols*. https://www.uottawa.ca/indigenous/sites/www.uottawa.ca.indigenous/files/icca_19_1126_reference_guide_eng_final2.pdf

- This guide is the result of close collaboration and representatives of Indigenous communities and the Indigenous Affairs at uOttawa.

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Module 3: Developing Your Intercultural Skills

About This Module

This module is focused on helping you identify further strategies and develop intercultural skills that will continue to expand as you become an interculturally-minded individual. Key components in this module highlight the importance of continuous intercultural development to develop intercultural competencies, which are transferable across personal and professional contexts. The content will focus on the skills of listening and observing to practice taking information while avoiding relying on preconceptions. You will practice skills associated with critical thinking and evaluating as cognitive strategies to create meaning and enhance understanding of intercultural behaviours and events. Finally, you will explore strategies for connecting and communicating with others and developing empathy as skills to support your engagement across contexts.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- apply skills related to listening, observing, and thinking critically to evaluate responses to situations
- identify at least five ways for building intercultural relations and developing cultural empathy
- identify at least five ways to interact with cultural others by paying attention to the type of language used in communication
- understand, explain, and articulate your own intercultural competence and identify at least five strategies to continue developing your intercultural skills

KeyWords

You can refer to the glossary at any time to find definitions of these and other keywords:

Active listening, Observation, Empathy, Critical thinking, OSEE tool

Setting the Scene

Tolerance, intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more essential than ever in a world where peoples are becoming more and more closely interconnected.

Kofi Annan

Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need for one another.

Desmond Tutu

Diversity: the art of thinking independently, together.

Malcom Forbes

Think About This

- Why do you think intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity are crucial in our society?
- Why is it considered a benefit to have diversity—people from different backgrounds with different identities—around us?

Becoming Interculturally-Minded

An interculturally-minded person looks beyond surface elements of culture, such as music, food, and celebrations, and demonstrates abilities that help them understand and engage comfortably and efficiently in intercultural contexts. Since we all live in a society, developing an intercultural mind can help you become a *global learner*. The skills that you develop in the process are transferable across contexts of your everyday life: from interactions with your family, neighbours, and peers at the university, to your engagement at work, with local people on your travels, and with members of your community. Developing skills is a lifelong process where you continue learning about others, adapting to the situation, and enhancing your competencies.

Developing intercultural skills is not limited to having successful interactions; it also involves:

- recognizing other people's experiences and histories
- taking the initiative to explore and engage with other cultures
- having conversations about topics that could be hard to discuss (e.g., Black Lives Matter, racialization, White privilege)
- having the capacity to adapt effortlessly to different situations
- identifying opportunities for continuous cultural growth
- being strategic about changing systems in favour of equity and belonging

Activity: what are Intercultural Competencies?

Explore the following list of intercultural competencies and select a maximum of three options that reflect something you feel you are already doing. Then select another three things you wish to dedicate more time to develop based on how you understand your own experience and skills. Record your selections on a separate paper or word processor. You will need them for the follow-up reflection.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1320#h5p-97>

Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva (2020)

University of Victoria: <https://www.uvic.ca/coopandcareer/career/build-skills/intercultural/index.php>

Mulgrave School: <https://www.mulgrave.com/enrichment/international-mindedness/mulgrave-intercultural-skills-understanding>

Think About This

Review the options in the previous activity that reflect **something you feel you are already doing**.

- What motivations did you have to develop those areas?

- What guidance or advice did you receive to encourage you to work on those competencies? How confident do you feel in each of those areas? Why?

Now, review the options that indicate **something that you would like to focus on developing**.

- Why is this important or immediately necessary for you?
- What have you experienced or observed that makes you think this is something you would like to concentrate on?

Takeaway Points

- Intercultural competencies are applicable to all contexts of interactions, whether formal or informal, at home or abroad, with your family, neighbours, peers, people you do not really know, or workmates.
- All abilities, skills, knowledge, and qualities that you develop through intercultural competence are transferable and will significantly improve your relationships, outlook, the way you work, and how you approach the fair treatment of cultural others.
- It is important you learn to recognize how intercultural competencies look in practice and how they can support all of your interactions.
- You do not need to focus on developing everything at once, but make sure you start with your own self-awareness in order to understand the perspectives of cultural others.

Try These Strategies

- Look at your surroundings—where you live or work. Who are the people with whom you interact the most? What about those with whom you rarely interact? What is something that you could be doing better? Think about two or three things that you could do to advance your development of intercultural competence. You can refer back to the list of competencies in this section to help you think about it.
- Take inventory of people in your immediate circle whose cultural upbringing may have been different from yours. What can you do to learn about their perspectives and experiences? You can start by engaging them more in conversation to learn from each other setting aside any potential assumptions you may have had of them.

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Understanding Your Own Intercultural Competence

Developing intercultural competence requires a shift in the way you think and approach people around you. This can be challenging because you need to develop an awareness of your own and other cultures and recognize the impact of culture and values in interactions while making the best of opportunities to engage with others. As you do this, you will find yourself having to change some attitudes that perhaps were not evident to you. You need to focus on deconstructing biases and stereotypes, being aware of microaggressions, being mindful about the value of people's perspectives, and adapting to situations based on knowledge and experiences. **Developing intercultural competence** is not something you do for a while or something you achieve within a couple of months; it is a **process whereby you continuously learn about yourself, the world, its people, the implications of ways to engage, and the unfairness of ignoring or racializing others.**

As you focus on developing your skills, consider Broadwell's Conscious Competence Learning Model (in Davis & Francis, 2021) to help you reflect on what you are learning, concentrate your efforts on developing skills more efficiently, and learn to recognize your progress. As you explore the various stages of the model, think about examples from your life where you have been at one stage or another.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1327#h5p-72>

Activity: Understanding (Un)conscious (In)competence

In the context of intercultural competence development, the four stages of this model are as follows, but they are not listed in the right order. Insert the stage that corresponds with the description provided. [Text adapted from [Krumrey-Fulks, 2021](#)]



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1327#h5p-74>

Taking time to understand how and what you are doing to develop awareness, knowledge, and skills is an important part of your intercultural development. To put this in the context of your own experience, [check out this Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist \(PDF\)](#). **This activity is not a test, and it does not measure intercultural competence.** However, answering questions of this type will help you understand what you are doing and can help you guide your efforts towards developing intercultural competence. Follow the instructions on the tool to complete the assessment and obtain your score.

Think About This

- Identify the areas in the self-assessment tool where you scored less, why do you think that is? What seems to be something you are not doing? What do you think you can do to improve those areas?
- Then, concentrate on the areas where you scored high, what are you doing that helped you obtain that score? What can you do to continue developing those areas?

Takeaway Points

- Being aware of what you are doing when interacting with cultural others can help you identify ways to improve areas associated with awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and skills.
- By identifying what you do not know (i.e., your limitations, and where you feel more comfortable and confident) allows you to be more intentional about your everyday interactions, the decisions you make, your reactions, and the potential consequences of your actions.

Try These Strategies

- Go back to your answers in the self-assessment tool. Select one or two areas and identify ways to develop them. Ask yourself: *How can I be more...? How can I make sure I...? What can I do to...?*
- Select any one of the areas in the self-assessment tool and use it as a conversation point with a friend from your same or different cultural background: *What can you learn from each other? How are they approaching...? How do they understand...?*
- Make a list of the things you feel you need to learn more about and find ways to expand your knowledge. Think about possible sources and reach out to them, whether at the university, at work, or within your community.

Listening

Listening is one of the most important skills you will need to work on to communicate, to learn from others, to create an open space for people to share their thoughts and life histories, to respect silences, and to demonstrate that you are a willing participant in the conversation. Listening is appreciated across cultures because it signals interest and respect and creates the opportunity for dialogue. This will always be a key skill to develop whether you are communicating with someone from a different culture, in another language, or learning about people's life experiences.

Note, however, it is important to acknowledge that, for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, communicating with others will take a different form. The purpose will continue to be taking in and sharing stories, experiences, and getting used to considering other perspectives and ways of being, but the way it is done will involve different means to convey the message and further relying on other resources (e.g., adapted media or printed material) for further learning.

Activity: Becoming an Active Listener

Do you know what it means to be an **active listener**? On a piece of paper, list at least three behaviours you associate with active listening.

Then watch the video [“How To Become An Active Listener” \(5'51”\)](#), which summarizes ways to improve your active listening skills. As you watch this video presented by Emeroy Bernardo, take notes of useful suggestions for your own reference. The skills associated with active listening are transferable, you can use them in all types of interactions.

Think About This

- Were any of the three active listening behaviours from your list mentioned in the video?
- What did you miss? How does active listening help you in interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds?

Active listening is the ability to focus completely on a speaker to understand their message and respond thoughtfully. It involves using verbal and nonverbal techniques to show interest and keep the attention on the speaker.



de Richelieu, A. (2020). Women Talking Outside. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/women-talking-outside-4427882/>

The way people behave while listening may vary slightly across cultures. For example, in the video, the presenter recommends maintaining eye contact, but this may not be the case for some people from East Asian cultures, where eye contact may be intermittent or perhaps even avoided depending on the situation (e.g., when interacting with authority figures or the elderly). Similarly, in many Caribbean and Middle Eastern cultures, some interruptions while listening may be appropriate as they signal that the listener is engaged in the conversation. This form of interaction helps create an interactive narrative, a connection with other people; therefore, it is not generally seen as inappropriate in the right context. In addition, it is important to be aware of other behaviours when interacting (e.g., listening to or making eye contact) with people that may live with autism or other neurodiversity-related issues, as their responses and reactions may not be the same as yours even if you share the same cultural background.



Li, E. (2021). Photo of Man and Woman Chilling in

the Balcony. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-man-and-woman-chilling-in-the-balcony-7188524/>



Samuel, T. (2020). Multiracial lesbian women talking on stone fence. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/multiracial-lesbian-women-talking-on-stone-fence-5845081/>



de Richelieu, A. (2020). Businessmen Having a Meeting at a Cafe. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/businessmen-having-a-meeting-at-a-cafe-4427908/>



Fortunato, W. (2020). Young diverse coworkers having coffee break together on city street. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/young-diverse-coworkers-having-coffee-break-together-on-city-street-6140377/>



RODNAE Productions. (2020). Cheerful diverse male friends having coffee break in outdoor cafe. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/cheerful-diverse-male-friends-having-coffee-break-in-outdoor-cafe-4921081/>



Subiyanto, K. (2020). Trendy young woman laughing at joke told by man. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/trendy-young-woman-laughing-at-joke-told-by-man-4307787/>

Takeaway Points

Active listening is a skill that you can develop any time while you converse with people inside and outside of your social circle.

It takes time to become a good listener, but as you practice active listening, you will have better interactions and will create a more comfortable space for people to share experiences and perspectives.

Be mindful of your own preferences while listening as well as those of the people with whom you interact. Becoming a good listener in intercultural situations takes practice and requires adaptations based, for instance, on culture or personality.

- To be a good listener, remember to pay attention, be involved, provide feedback, avoid judging, and respond appropriately.



Diez, J. (2021). Stylish multiethnic friends drinking takeaway coffee and gossiping on bench in park. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/stylish-multiethnic-friends-drinking-takeaway-coffee-and-gossiping-on-bench-in-park-7388880/>

Try These Strategies

- Since there are different cultural approaches to listening, paying attention to your surroundings, the situation, and the people involved is crucial.
 - Learn to observe people in conversation without being intrusive. You do not need to hear or understand the conversation, but you can observe what they do while listening and speaking.
 - Aim to create an open space for listening by removing judgement so you can pay attention to the other person's experience.
 - When you are in a conversation, be genuine and supportive, especially when the other person shares their perspective or feels moved to share a difficult experience. You can say, "Tell me more," "How did that make you feel?" or "What can I do to help?"
- Focus on listening to gain an understanding, respond based on what is needed in the conversation, and develop an appreciation for listening.
 - Consider the following aspects of listening based on Judi Brownell's (2010) research to be more intentional about your engagement and to help you further develop your listening skills:
 - **Hearing:** Eliminate distractions and concentrate on the message.
 - **Understanding:** If something is unclear, ask for clarification; rephrase to check you understand; avoid interrupting unnecessarily.
 - **Remembering:** Stay calm, particularly if you are having a difficult conversation or if you are listening to something you disagree with; remain focused and make mental notes to retain the message to be able to follow up.
 - **Interpreting:** Pay attention to the verbal and nonverbal signals of communication, take into account the context where this is happening, how it happens, and who is involved in the interaction.
 - **Evaluating:** Listen carefully before responding, take time to think about the message without

being critical or making judgments, check your own biases and cultural values, and learn to distinguish what comes from emotion or facts.

- **Responding:** Use empathy, connect with the other person, and be aware of how you respond verbally and nonverbally, consider how your response, reaction, or feedback may affect the other person.

Observing

Learning to observe is another key skill that you will need to purposefully develop as you focus on developing intercultural competencies. Being a good observer does not mean you stare or look intently to understand what is happening. Instead, it means learning to detach yourself from personal feelings, judgements, and biases to appreciate what is happening from a more objective perspective. In other words, you want to be aware of yourself so that you can leave emotions and preconceptions aside and focus on what is unravelling in front of your eyes.

Activity: Observing in a different way

Imagine you are an observer in each of the following five situations. Take a moment to look at each photo and then spend between half a minute to a minute with each image to write down everything you can think of as you look at it. Do not worry about “getting it right;” this exercise is just for you to be aware of what is it that you notice and what each situation expresses from your own perspective: *Who are the people? What is happening? Are you aware of your immediate feelings and reactions?*



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1334#h5p-75>

You will now see each image again, but this time choose the option that better describes what is happening.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1334#h5p-76>

Did any of the explanations for each situation reflect what you first observed? If you did not get all the answers correctly, it is not a problem! This simply demonstrates that one cannot rely on a single image to understand what is really happening. Even if you got all the answers right, it may also be that you knew or understood more of the content to create meaning. Another way to understand this is by imagining you start a movie for the first time at its halfway point. The plot probably would not make sense to you until you learn more about the characters, the background, their motivations, the tone, the story, and so on.

Objective observation is the ability to use our senses to describe what we notice as spectators, eyewitnesses, or participants in the world around us. It involves describing behaviour by noticing details while taking in new information and explaining it without judgement drawn from emotional reactions and value systems.

To make fair observations, we need to understand the context of the situation and the intention around it. This understanding applies to what you may notice while shopping at the grocers, a reaction you caught from a peer while in class, something you saw in passing while driving, an image shown on TV, or an action or custom you

observed while travelling. Lacking information about what we observe can create confusion, misunderstanding, or even elicit undesirable reactions from people. Pay attention and always leave room for interpretation. Ask when you are not sure of something and avoid making assumptions that may turn into stereotypes or misjudgements of others.

Takeaway points

- Observation skills are important when we look at images as well as when we are immersed as participant observers in a situation.
- The most important thing to remember is that things may not be what they seem. We may be looking at one angle, one perspective, without really understanding the background or the whole story.
- As you try to make sense of things from your own perspective, ensure you are also leaving room for interpretation and learning to have a greater, better-informed picture of what you perceive.

Try these strategies

- Start by making a pause to think and understand your own positioning in each situation: Are you participating or are you external to the interaction? Is this something you have observed before or is this the first time?
- Consider the context (e.g., place, time, relationship of the people involved, culture) where the situation takes place.
- Be aware of how the biases and stereotypes you carry may affect how you perceive a situation. Focus on what is happening in an objective way. It is normal to have a reaction such as surprise or confusion, but do not allow that to become your only understanding of the situation. Instead, try to learn more about the background of the situation or event.
- Try to observe without staring to avoid making people uncomfortable. Remember, there is a difference between staring (fixating on something or someone) and observing (paying attention to notice things).
- Allow yourself to notice things, but ensure you do not judge as you observe.
- Pay attention to verbal and nonverbal communication, but always leave room for an alternative interpretation. Remind yourself that the real explanation may be something you have not considered.
- Be patient and do not jump to conclusions; you may be using your cultural lenses to interpret what you see, and you may not understand the whole picture.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking in intercultural interactions is a valuable skill that involves addressing a problem by first being aware of your own cultural reality when considering different perspectives, when you seek to understand through your own cultural lenses, and when your intention is to approach a careful explanation of what happens around you. This skill requires a conscious effort to train yourself to avoid relying on biases, stereotypes, and your own opinions as you consider a situation. Critical thinking is transferable across all contexts (e.g., at university, work, or complex situations) and it is a crucial skill in intercultural development because it allows you to stop, think, and find a way to interpret and explain issues based on your listening and observation skills, your intercultural experience, and the use of resources.

Critical thinking refers to the ability to analyze behaviours, events, and observations to understand, relate to, create meaning, address an issue, or find solutions. It requires you to be objective as you seek to understand different perspectives and then reflect on them in relation to your own experience.

Activity: Critical Incident

Read the following narrative (also known as a critical incident) describing a misunderstanding between people from different backgrounds. What you will read is based on real observations from the perspective of a Hong Kong Chinese student (Jackson, 2002). Critical incident, questions, and feedback responses adapted from Jackson, 2002.



ICSA. (2018). Man Wearing Black Adidas Jacket Sitting on Chair Near Another Man Wearing Blue Jacket. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-wearing-black-adidas-jacket-sitting-on-chair-near-another-man-wearing-blue-jacket-1708988/>

An interrupted lesson

Last year, I took Professor Lo's class on Ecological Environment of China at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. My classmates were all local, except for a few exchange students who were seated together. On the first day of class, the lesson started smoothly, all students were quiet while listening to the lecture. Half an hour into Professor Lo's lecture, Natalie, an exchange student, suddenly raised her hand. The professor was focused on his lesson and he was not aware someone of Natalie's raised hand; he probably did not expect any questions from students, as is usual. When other local students sitting behind the exchange students saw the raised hand, their first reaction was of surprise because students *rarely* ask questions during lessons. After a while, Professor Lo saw Natalie's raised hand and she started asking her question, which was related to what he had just explained. Professor Lo smiled, nodded, and provided an answer.

We thought that the rest of the class would continue in silence. However, Natalie and the other exchange students took turns to raise their hands and ask questions. I exchanged concerned looks with the classmate sitting next to me. Other local students also looked at each other, half surprised and half confused. The exchange students were eager to ask questions, and Professor Lo also started to look uncomfortable. Particularly when some exchange students did not agree with Professor Lo's point of view. At this point, Alison, another exchange student, started to debate with the professor.

As students, we listen to our professors' views and then we try to think about our own perspectives, on our own, or may discuss them with fellow students. We do not openly disagree or contradict the professor. However, this exchange student was debating with Professor Lo during the class, in front of other students. The atmosphere was strange and tense. Other local students were also startled. Some students even frowned and showed an embarrassed expression. I thought: "How come a student challenges a professor and doesn't give

him face (respect)?” Luckily, the lesson ended, and the exchange students hurried to get to their next lessons as if nothing happened. At that moment, Professor Lo sighed and seemed relieved, just like the local students.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1337#h5p-77>

Think about this

- In the situation above, you looked at the issue from the perspective of Hong Kong students. How does this look from your own perspective as a current or past student? How different or similar are the roles and expectations? Did you ever feel confused or at loss? Why?
- Consider a similar situation in the workplace, how different do you think this form of interaction between an authority figure and subordinates would be? In your own experience, are you expected to openly interact with your boss during a meeting? Can you raise concerns, questions, and perhaps explain if you disagree with something?

Whether you are living abroad or in Canada, it is important to pay attention to behaviours (in the case above, ways to show respect and relate to authority figures) and any other instance associated with cultural values that may create misunderstandings. What can you do to learn about these unwritten rules?

Takeaway points

- All of us have experienced being in a situation that was confusing or made us think that other people are “wrong.”
- Making a pause to think about issues instead of immediately reacting or making assumptions makes all the difference when interacting interculturally, at home or abroad.
- It is not always easy to stop, breathe, and think, but the more you try to look at a problem using a critical thinking perspective, the better you will be at adapting to, understanding, and even explaining a situation to others.

Try these strategies

When you are in a situation where something seems amiss, where people’s actions or attitudes seem wrong, take a step back and take time to:

- **Describe the problem or issue:** From an objective point of view, what is happening?
- **Recognize the influence of the context:** Who is involved? When or where is this happening?
- **Consider all perspectives:** What do you know about the other person’s culture? What role could personal or cultural values be playing? Could this respond to cultural tendencies, or is it an issue involving personality? What are you assuming about the other person?
- **Check your bias and stereotypes:** Are you making assumptions before gaining a better understanding of what is happening? Are you allowing preconceptions to create meaning for you?
- **Ask questions:** Whenever possible, approach other people to gain clarity, learn about how things are done, come from a place of curiosity, be mindful, and listen.
- **Decide how you can follow up:** Can you have a conversation with the person? Do you need to learn more and come back to them? What could you try to clarify, moderate, explain, or help?

Evaluating

Evaluating behaviour and observations in intercultural contexts involves exploring and considering various explanations for what is new or different to us and deciding on the best way to interpret them. It is part of a process that may require gathering more information to create a meaning we can understand without relying on assumptions, stereotypes, or pre-judgements.

Interpretation and evaluation skills involve carefully formulating alternative explanations for what we listen to and observe. To do this, you need to go through a process that helps you move beyond assumptions and judgemental reactions. The OSEE tool developed by Darla Deardorff (2012) will help you practise this process; it involves the following steps:

- O – Observe (and listen to) what is happening
- S – State objectively what is happening
- E – Explore different explanations for what is happening
- E – Evaluate which explanation(s) is the most likely one(s)

The tool provides a way to respond more objectively in intercultural situations. In the process, you observe or listen to what is happening, training yourself to keep a neutral attitude and preventing your judgement from influencing you, which is a skill you develop through practice. As you interpret meaning, it is important to consider that culture is not the only factor involved; there are values and personalities, background information, as well as environmental factors that affect our views, outlook, and how we understand our surroundings.

Activity: Immersing yourself in the context

1. Watch [Thrones of Semana Santa video](#) (7'24") and think about what is happening.
2. As you watch, **avoid** saying or thinking, "That's weird," "That's insane," "That doesn't make sense," because that shows you are making a judgement.
3. Train yourself to think: "That's different," "I didn't know that," "I wonder what that is or why they do that," which **recognizes differences and encourages inquisitiveness and curiosity**. By doing this, you will concentrate on finding and understanding alternative explanations for what you observe.
4. After watching the video, think about or select a single scene you watched and answer the questions in the [Immersing Yourself in the Context handout](#), a fillable word document that downloads automatically, as in the example provided in the handout. Doing so will help you practice observing, formulating objective descriptions, and considering different alternatives to explain what you see and hear.

Notice how the different parts of this process are interconnected: You need to **observe**, listen, and pay attention in order to describe what is happening. **Stating objectively** requires you to think and consciously separate what is a description from an explanation. As you **explore** different ways to explain what you observe, you practice being open to more than one way to interpret what you see or hear without committing to a single explanation. Finally, when you **evaluate**, you are bringing together different cognitive and attitudinal skills by taking into consideration what you observe and then formulating a description stripped of assumptions and judgement, helping you consider alternatives and decide on the best way to interpret the event.

We can add another step to this process to **confirm your understanding**, wherein you talk to others or use other means to check if you reached the correct interpretation. Being able to confirm your understanding is an

important part of the process to ensure that the knowledge you gain is consistent with the understanding and interpretations of the rest of the group. In the example above, if you are walking on the street and see men in a truck spreading grass, perhaps you can ask one of the people around why this is done, instead of assuming that your interpretation must be correct. The reason why you go through the process is to help you get used to suspending judgement, which often affects our interactions with people. By training yourself to withhold assumptions and criticism, you are in a better position to understand others' actions and reactions, to be more objective when you witness behaviour that is new to you, and to engage more fully as a participant in an event. You can develop the different skills involved in the process by being purposeful about how you observe, by understanding your reaction, and by being open to look for and consider more than one explanation.

Activity: Further application of the OSEE tool

Watch the following video from minute 12' to 14' and follow the process of the OSEE tool, but this time you will have the opportunity to confirm your understanding and incorporate your thoughts about how the event or observation could be misinterpreted by others. See the example provided:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1460#oembed-1>

videoronda. (2019, April 15). Gitanos, Tribuna, Domingo de Ramos, Ronda 2019 [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKtSE7yvXdI>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1460#h5p-78>

You should be aware of potential causes for misinterpretation in any observation or intercultural event. If you can identify them, you can then work to gain a better understanding of the situation, event, or behaviour, as you did in the activity above. The same strategy applies to intercultural interactions, whether you are a participant or an observer. For example, in a conversation, there may be topics, expressions, or behaviours that are misinterpreted, and this can happen even with people of your same cultural group. Pay attention to those elements in intercultural exchanges to ensure that the intended message and intention are clear, from your own and the other person's positioning. In other words, **be mindful and practise recognizing potential sources of misinterpretation.**

Every person will generally have a reaction to what they observe, particularly if it is something they do not understand or is a new experience. In some instances, they may also have a strong opinion about an observation if it relates to a debatable topic. Regardless of personal views, it is important to identify unfair observations and find ways to express your reaction that do not carry judgment, which you can do by carefully choosing your words, as you will practise in the following activity.

Activity: Evaluating responses

Explore the following video stills and turn the card to read the reactions provided. In the box under each still, reformulate the reactions so they do not carry judgement while still conveying the original idea. You may watch part of the video for further context. The location of the still within the video is indicated at the front of the card.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1460#h5p-81>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

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An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1460#h5p-82>

Think about this

In this section, you have practised suspending judgement through different strategies including observation, articulating objective descriptions, considering different alternatives for interpreting behaviour, and carefully formulating responses. Think about how repeating this process, even in your mind, on the spot, whenever you have the opportunity, can help you avoid judging behaviour on the basis of your own knowledge and perceptions. What is the importance of pausing before reacting? Why is it necessary to be objective? How does developing these skills help you in different situations, formal or informal, at home or abroad, with your family, at university or at work, when watching the news or a TV show? Make sure to reflect on these questions so you help yourself internalize this process.

Takeaway points

- What you think you see does not always mean what you think it means.
- Whether at home or abroad, using the OSEE tool can help you develop observation and listening skills, which will be crucial for a more objective interpretation of what happens in front of or around you.
- Do not underestimate the importance of these skills; they are intended to help you suspend judgement to allow yourself to consider the context and people involved so that you can create meaning and interpret what you see.
- Observation, paying careful attention, describing and reacting withholding judgement, and considering different alternatives to explain behaviour and events are all transferable skills applicable across professional, familial, and informal contexts.

Try these strategies

- Make it a habit to pause and make objective observations and guesses without jumping to conclusions. Try doing this while watching a movie from Sweden, Pakistan, Angola, Iran, Serbia, or any country different from your own. You can also try this while sitting at the university quad, waiting for a taxi, or in any public place. Make sure to try observing people from the same and other cultures.
- Attend multicultural festivals, as they provide a great opportunity to explore cultures with the senses. Take the opportunity to observe and chat with people informally. Ask questions, be open to learning, and allow yourself to take in new information, cultural expressions, and ways of thinking and being.
- Whenever possible, try to find out if your inferences or evaluations were right. People feel appreciated if you show interest in them, this goes both ways. You can learn more about your own culture while you explore others'.

Building Relationships

As you were growing up, how did you make friends? What rules do you know about making acquaintances? Is it easy for you to call someone a friend, or does it take a long time? Where and how do you meet people? Is it easy for you to strike up a conversation with a stranger? Do you prefer to have a reason to chat with others? Why is it important to build relationships?

Now think about what it is like to make friends across cultures. Does everyone follow the same rules? Can you have the same expectations and approaches to friendship? In successful intercultural interactions, people make some accommodations to facilitate communication and build relationships; why is it worth making an effort?

Karen Krumrey-Fulks (2020) observes that “the benefits of intercultural relationships span differences in gender, age, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, religion, and much more. The moment you begin an intercultural relationship is the moment you begin to learn more about the world”. Building relationships goes beyond interpersonal benefits because it encourages tolerance in society while also motivating people to try to understand themselves better and pause before judging other people who seem different to them.

Activity: Unexpected Connections

Watch the video [Das Experiment \(2020\)](#) (4’08”) about a social experiment in Germany and imagine yourself amongst the people in the group. In which cases would you walk to the front? Would you have guessed you had a connection with the rest of the group? Why? Why not?

Do not forget to click on the CC button for English subtitles.



CottonBro. (2021). Photo of People Wearing White Crew Neck Shirt. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-people-wearing-white-crew-neck-shirt-8088499/>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1464#h5p-83>

The following statements are related to building intercultural relationships. Decide whether the statements are true or false and consider what you have learned so far in terms of intercultural competence as well as your own experience, and what you know about interacting across cultures. Some information in this activity is adapted from [Thompson / Revilla in About Intercultural Friendship](#).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1464#h5p-84>



Bertelli, M. (2020). Positive diverse people making faces at camera. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/positive-diverse-people-making-faces-at-camera-3856033/>

TakeAway Points

- It is easy to make friends with someone who is very similar to you who shares the same background and worldview, but you might not learn as much about what is happening in the world or within your own community if you do not start connecting with someone who sees things in a different way, or whose experience is different from yours (e.g., racialized individuals, immigrants across different countries, people from a different part of town, and so on).
- You cannot assume that someone who *seems* different does not share any ways of thinking, doing, or being with you. You may even be surprised to find *more* things in common with someone from another culture. Commonalities are found in value orientations, ways of thinking, preferences and activities, as well as in experiences of hardship, approaches to work, attitudes towards global and local issues, and so on.
- If we do not invest in building relationships, not only to feel close to people, but to also learn from each other and to see things in a way we had not considered, we ignore everyone's history and how our attitudes, behaviours, and decisions affect each other.
- Choosing to engage with others decreases feelings of isolation and segregation. You can engage while at work, studying abroad, working in a team, with your neighbours, teachers, members of your family, your friends, and virtually anyone else. Choosing to engage has a ripple effect in society and positively affects our relationships with cultural others.

Try these strategies

- Join (or start) a group at the university or your workplace and attend events celebrating another culture whenever possible.

- Start a conversation with a classmate or workmate whom you think is from a different cultural group (Canadian or international).
- Reach out to people you may know and with whom you do not normally spend a lot of time.
- Talk to people when you are at a café, do not just stare at your phone. Be present in your surroundings instead of limiting yourself to living in a virtual space.
- For an example of **how it looks to connect with someone with whom you do not share the same perspectives**, watch this video.
 - Note: Although the video [Heineken Worlds Apart](#) (5'22") promotes having a chat over a drink, it is a great example of how we can approach difference.

In addition to the above, once you have started connecting with others, here are 10 steps you can take to build relationships:

1. Demonstrate an **interest** in other people. Try to learn to pronounce their name correctly, the effort goes a long way.
2. **Examine** your biases and stereotypes.
3. **Read** about other people's culture and history.
4. **Ask** others about their cultures, customs, and views, but do not treat them like encyclopedias; focus on **connecting** with them.
5. **Listen** to others tell their stories, whether in conversation or via postings on social media (as you interact, remember the difference between cultural and individual perspectives).
6. **Notice** differences in communication styles and values.
7. Check your understanding of what people are trying to communicate with you and **be patient** if English is not their first language.
8. Be ready to **adapt** your behaviour without expecting that others will be adapting to you.
9. Do not be afraid to **apologize**; it is okay to make **mistakes**. What matters is what you do after that.
10. Learn to create a culture of **belonging** and be a support for racialized individuals whether they are peers, friends, relatives, acquaintances, or even people you do not know.

Developing Empathy

Do you know the difference between empathy and sympathy? Based on what you know, is it better to show sympathy or empathy towards other people? Watch this short video explaining the difference between sympathy and empathy and how it works on a personal level. Before you watch, think about a time when you needed to feel support and understanding from another person. Can you remember what they said? What effect did that have?



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1471#oembed-1>

RSA. (2013, December 10). Brené Brown on Empathy [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>. Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0. | [Transcript](#)

Think about this

- Why do you think empathy is more effective than sympathy?
- Why does sympathy “not work”?

Cultural empathy is the action of understanding, being aware of, appreciating, and connecting with the experiences, circumstances, and feelings of others. It involves the use of strategies to share understanding and connecting with another person.

Sympathy is the act of commiserating with someone else’s feelings or struggles in a way that whatever affects one person will affect the other. It involves a shared mental state instead of developing an understanding.

Developing cultural empathy is a skill that will allow you to consider the perspectives, experiences, and feelings of another person based on their cultural background or the struggles and challenges they face. Empathy helps you equip yourself with strategies to communicate this understanding of people around you, whether from your own or another cultural background, more effectively. One of the key elements of cultural empathy is the link between considering what one person is going through and reflecting on that coming from a place of understanding. You do not need to be an expert communicator to use empathy, but this does not come without challenges, as you will find out next.

Activity: Why Do We Need Empathy?

Watch this second short video highlighting the importance of empathy in our society. Before you watch, in your opinion, what benefits may empathy bring to intercultural interactions and society as a whole?





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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence?p=1471#oembed-2>

Tremendousness. (2017, August 1). Understanding Empathy [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAJ6jDoePyY> | [Transcript](#)



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence?p=1471#h5p-85>

Understanding Empathy in Context

After completing the previous activities, you should have a better understanding of the difference between empathy and sympathy, as well as some ideas to develop your cultural empathy skills. Once you start practising empathy with others around you, whether from your same or a different cultural group, you will start noticing it more in different contexts, as you will explore next.



Mental Health America (MHA). (2020). Friends Sitting at a Park. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/friends-sitting-at-a-park-5543174/>

Activity: Understanding Others Through Various Lenses

To help you expand your understanding within a personal journey, watch the [TED talk We're Experiencing an Empathy Shortage, But We Can Fix It Together](#) (13'18") where Jamil Zaki shares his experience developing empathy, providing examples of its use and placing it within a greater context.

After watching the video, read the following statements and decide whether they are true or false based on what Jamil Zaki discussed:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1484#h5p-86>

From the activity above, you can infer ways in which skills associated with intercultural development are interrelated and complement each other. For example, in order to be a better listener, you need to also learn to be a good observer; if you want to gain an understanding of other people's life perspectives, you need to exercise critical thinking; and in order to appreciate other people's histories, struggles, and experiences, you need to develop empathy. By being intentional about developing intercultural skills, you will create opportunities to expand those skills and support people with whom you interact. Remember that all of these skills are transferable across all contexts of interactions.

Takeaway points

- It is important to remember that cultural empathy does not mean you necessarily agree with the person's perspective; you may not support their views, but you understand "where they're coming from."
- Practising empathy does not make you a weaker person, it makes you stronger because you are able to connect with and understand other people, many of whom are from a different cultural group.
- Empathy can have a positive effect on society because it encourages considering other perspectives and it also has benefits for our own mental health, our relationships, and can even improve performance at work.

Try these strategies

- Before you assume, ask; just because you think you know someone, it does not mean they are who or what you think they are.
- To develop cultural empathy, try being more intentional about it. Make an effort!
- Take time to listen more, pay attention to what people say, and put yourself in their shoes. You can do this with someone in your family or a close friend and then expand it to other people from your own and other cultural groups.
- Try using empathy to understand someone from a different cultural group, their life history, their experiences, and perspectives; this will help you gain a deeper understanding of culturally relevant and social justice issues. As you do this, always remember that each one of us has a personal story and a single individual (or story) is not a representation of everyone's experience.

Language as (Mis)Communication

How many languages do you speak? Have you studied any language before? Do you speak any other languages with family or friends? How much do you know about other languages?

Having the ability to speak in more than one language allows you to communicate and interact more holistically with people who speak that language: It helps you appreciate written works in their original form, can be very useful when travelling, and may open more doors when you are looking for employment. Another important reason why learning another language is beneficial is that it gives you the opportunity to glimpse into how other speakers construct meaning, part of which is also linked to cultural values and related behaviours.



Fortunato, W. (2020) Happy multiethnic men bumping arms on street. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/happy-multiethnic-men-bumping-arms-on-street-6140408/>

Activity: What Do You Know About Languages?

There are many interesting facts about languages that often help us understand people's cultural positioning. Read the following statements and decide whether they are **TRUE** or **FALSE** based on your knowledge or best guess.

Adapted from [50+ Fascinating Language Facts You Didn't Know](#)



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1487#h5p-101>

Explore the [50+ Fascinating Language Facts to Inspire You Infographic](#) to review your answers and browse the rest of the information.

Which of these facts are new to you? Are you surprised by any of them? If you had the opportunity to learn another language, which one would you like to learn? Why?

Think About This

The following are questions you should consider for understanding your own views on preserving one's language and the experiences around language. Use these questions to reflect on what happens when we move across cultures for a long period of time.

- How important is language in cultural interactions?
- How can language affect the way we interact and the way we perceive people?
- Why do people who move to other countries try to preserve their language?
- What motivations could they have to potentially avoid using their language?

These are important questions you might consider in order to understand your own views and experiences, as well as to start thinking about what happens when we move across cultures for a long period of time.

Activity: Language in intercultural exchange



Plavalaguna, D. (2020). Multiracial Group of People by the Table. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/multiracial-group-of-people-by-the-table-6150432/>

You will watch a [TEDTalk Lost in Translation by Janesh Rahlan](#) (15'32") describing his experience as the son of immigrant parents in the United States, including what he learned about preserving language and using it to transmit elements of culture across national lines. As you watch, think about how his experience can inform your own intercultural communication skills.

Take notes of Rahlan's talk to help you remember key ideas and then answer the questions below, paying attention to strategies he describes that you could use in your own interactions.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1487#h5p-99>

Whether you have travelled abroad or have never left the country where you were born, it is very likely that making the effort to learn another language can indeed make all the difference in intercultural situations. If you travel abroad to study, work, volunteer, or just to visit, arriving in a country where you do not speak the language can be extremely challenging and stressful.

Look at this from a different perspective, consider what happens to **new immigrants in Canada**, who can be, for example, voluntary migrants, permanent or temporary residents, visitors, or refugees. Many new immigrants already speak English or French when they move to the country, but many others perhaps did not have the opportunity to learn any of these languages. Without the ability to speak the language(s) of the country where you live, it is more difficult to understand cultural norms, systems of transportation, ways to shop, how to open a bank

account, rules and regulations, and so forth. All of these can turn into a struggle and increase feelings of loneliness and homesickness.

Making an effort to learn another language provides you with more than communicative skills; it facilitates the development of relationships, positively affecting your interactions with other cultural members. You do not need to become completely bilingual to begin experiencing cultures in a different way, but **taking the time to learn another language is an investment in the rest of your life**. In addition, learning *about* other languages can also help you understand how people think and culturally orient themselves when they speak in one or another language, as illustrated in the examples below. The examples are intended to show you a link between language and the relevant cultural background or tendencies without creating stereotypes, so you can better appreciate how learning another language (or learning *about* other languages) can help you gain a better understanding of its speakers' perspectives.

Language	Example	Relation to cultural knowledge
Arabic	Among Muslim people, it is common to use the expression "Insh'Allah" in formal and informal conversation, which means "God willing."	Most people from Arabic-speaking countries tend to have an <i>external orientation</i> , which indicates that they generally accept there are things they cannot control.
Italian	There are two genders in Italian, masculine and feminine, which speakers use to refer to themselves and others. To express the idea of "I'm tired" in Italian, speakers may say "Sono stanco" (masculine) or "Sono stanca" (feminine) depending on their gender identity.	Using genders creates a distinction between the way a man or a woman speak; in addition, since all nouns in Italian are either masculine or feminine, people often associate certain qualities to one or another: "il ponte" (the bridge, masculine – strong, long), "la luna" (the moon, feminine – beautiful).
Korean	Personal pronouns change depending on the age of the person to whom one is speaking. It is important to know the correct form to use when addressing someone older or someone younger. The term "friend" is commonly used only with someone that is of the same age.	Korean society tends to place high importance on hierarchy and ways to show respect to elders, employers, professionals, and people with authority. As a result, there are ten ways to say "you" in Korean, depending on age, type of relationship, context, and level of formality.
Spanish	Each Spanish-speaking country has its own accent. Pronouns and the meaning of some words may differ from one place to another, eliciting different ways to connect and establish relationships with others.	If you visit countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Panama, Colombia, Cuba, or Chile, you may connect better with people if you use the form "ustedes" (you, plural) instead of "vosotros" (you, plural, informal) commonly used in Spain.



Lach, R. (2021). Woman in Brown Leather Jacket. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-in-brown-leather-jacket-9168825/>

Activity: Critical Incidents

Working with real-life scenarios can help you develop your intercultural skills. This is because they help you visualize the situation and perhaps you can even relate to them based on your own experience. Read the following situations and decide which option best explains what happened in each case:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1487#h5p-88>

When we communicate, we are, in fact, participating in a transaction where one person starts with an idea, then the other takes that and replies based on the intended meaning. Miscommunication indeed occurs with people of our own culture, our closest friends, relatives, or workmates. When communication takes place across cultural and linguistic contexts, the chance of misinterpreting messages is higher. That is where your communication skills in English or other languages become more relevant. To learn more about **what is involved in the process of communication and how miscommunication can happen**, watch the video from TED-Ed, [How Miscommunication Happens \(And How to Avoid It\)](#) (4'32"), narrated by Katherine Hampsten.



Monstera. (2020). Delighted diverse couple having breakfast at table. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/delighted-diverse-couple-having-breakfast-at-table-5996978/>

Takeaway points

- Miscommunication can happen between members of the same or different cultures. Be aware of how you are communicating, use your listening and observation skills, pay attention to the nonverbal signals, and take time to really understand what the other person is trying to convey.
- Learning another language will increase your ability to gain cultural insights and will allow you to create connections with speakers of that language much faster. In addition, this will also boost your communication skills and your employability.
- If you do not speak another language, and even if you do, it is also important to learn about how other languages work because culture and language constantly influence each other. Expanding your knowledge about how other languages work will give you a glimpse into how other people create meaning through their language, which in turn will help you develop skills to improve your communication and understanding.
- Humour is culturally constructed and does not translate well if it requires specific cultural knowledge to understand the references (e.g., political figures or events). If a joke is a play on words, it may not be clear to all speakers of other languages. It is okay to tell jokes but be mindful of how humour may or may not translate.

Try these strategies

Here are 10 strategies to help you communicate better with speakers of other languages:

- To communicate more effectively across cultures, **pay attention** to the speaker and **be patient**, English may be their second, third, or fourth language.

- If communication is not clear, you can try to **write things down** or use drawings.
- If you or the other person are not able to convey a message, you can also try to use a **web translator** (e.g., Google translate). Remember, these applications are not entirely reliable, as they translate words but not the intention within a given context.
- **Speak clearly** and use simple words; this does not mean to speak loudly or in broken English.
- **Avoid using slang** (e.g., to ghost, to flex, lowkey, dope, GOAT, lit, sick), **jargon** (words used by a particular profession that are difficult to understand: legal, sports, medical jargon), **idiomatic expressions** (e.g., “It’s raining cats and dogs,” “Break a leg”), or **colloquialisms** (e.g., ballpark figure, rain check, gong show).
- Avoid using **yes/no questions** to check their understanding. Invite the person to explain what they understood in their own words instead. Use yes/no questions when communication is more challenging to help you simplify the message.
- Do not get frustrated; focus on how to **make it work**. Remember, communication goes both ways.
- To become a better communicator, make the conscious effort to **talk to people across cultural lines**; you would be building bridges and making connections with the added benefit that you would be developing a variety of skills.
- **Learn another language** and glimpse into another culture through it.
- In addition to the language itself, be mindful of what is discussed and how it is addressed. **Prepare yourself** to have uncomfortable discussions, for example, about anti-racism and dominant group privilege. You can do this by learning more about these topics and understanding and supporting people who have been unfairly treated or discriminated against. Learn to communicate across difficult topics.

Applying Your Intercultural Skills

As you focus on developing your intercultural skills, you may be wondering *where to start*. You do not need to look far because Canada, just as many other countries, is home to people from many cultures. When we refer to cultural others, we are not limited to people who were born in other countries; this also involves people who are Canadian-born but perhaps have a sociocultural experience different from yours. Cultural others are people who may seem different from you or who present themselves as being from a different culture. If you do not have neighbours from other cultures, perhaps you have co-workers, family members, childhood friends, peers, or members of your club who have a different cultural background. What do you know about them? What do you know about their traditions or the things they had to change to adapt to living in Canada? What do you know about their history and experiences? What can you ask?

Activity: Making Connections With Cultural Others

To help you position yourself in a way to approach people around you, whether you do this at home or abroad, consider the following situation:

You and your friend have not seen each other in person for a few months and decide to meet for a catch-up coffee. At the coffee shop, you spent nearly two hours chatting. Your friend then says that she is going to hear a talk by Truepayna Moo, whom she met a few weeks before, and invites you to come along. You do not know who this person is, but you are happy to join your friend. You sit down in the auditorium and your friend tells you that Truepayna was born in a refugee camp in Thailand after her parents fled violence in Burma.

At this point, all kinds of questions and assumptions are coming to your mind. On a separate piece of paper, write down the first five things that come to your mind with regards to Truepayna, based on what you know so far. Be honest about it.



Pixabay. (2016). Opened Notebook With Three Assorted-color Pens. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/opened-notebook-with-three-assorted-color-pens-236111/>

As people get situated in their seats, you realize you have more questions forming in your mind:

- What do you think she will be like?
- What was her experience as a refugee?
- What image forms in your mind when you think of refugees?
- What do you expect her to talk about?
- What stereotypes or biases do you have?
- Check your expectations and assumptions, be aware of them



Quintero, L. (2019). People Sitting on Gang Chairs. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/people-sitting-on-gang-chairs-2774556/>

The lights are dimmed, and Truepayna Moo comes to the centre of the stage. As you watch her presentation [Coming to Canada: The Courage to be Multicultural](#) (8'40"):

- Observe and pay attention to her voice, gestures, and appearance
- Listen to her story, practice active listening
- As she talks, write down or take mental notes of potential questions you would like to ask her
- Be aware of the preconceptions you formed about her and how different the reality is from your original thoughts



Grevendonck, K. (2019). Microphone On Stand. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/microphone-on-stand-2101488/>

As Truepayna finishes speaking, your friend asks you what you thought about the presentation. What would you say?

- What are the most important things you have learned from listening to her story?
- How has this changed the way you see refugees?
- What do you think you can do next time you meet a refugee?



Akacha, A. (2021). Ethnic twins looking at camera in refugee camp. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/ethnic-twins-looking-at-camera-in-refugee-camp-6918515/>

After the talk, your friend takes you to meet Truepayna and the three of you go out for a meal. This is your opportunity to learn, share, listen, and observe.

- What would you talk about?
- How would you listen?
- What would you share about yourself?
- What questions would you like to ask her?
- What would you do if there was a misunderstanding?
- What would you do next to keep getting to know Truepayna and other people like her?



Lopes, H. (2017). Wine Glasses On Table. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/wine-glasses-on-table-696217/>
 As you continue to develop your intercultural skills, you will be able to integrate more of them into your interactions. Skills are not the only area you need to focus on developing because they would not be as effective without having worked on developing intercultural awareness and expanding your intercultural knowledge. The activity you just completed is an **example of how you bring together different elements of your intercultural preparation to any interaction.**

In this case, the guided activity above helped you to focus on:

- understanding yourself and others
- being aware of bias and stereotypes and deconstructing them
- identifying gaps in intercultural knowledge
- being open to learning and challenging preconceptions
- and finding ways to continue relating to others

Takeaway points

- People often have good intentions, but they do not always know where to start to converse or engage with people from other cultural backgrounds.
- We often have misconceptions about anyone who seems different, but through awareness of our biases and stereotypes and by expanding our intercultural knowledge, we can become better at engaging, understanding experiences, and promoting interculturality.
- Developing intercultural skills goes hand in hand with an awareness of your own culture, having the courage to change attitudes, and being intentional about expanding your knowledge about your own as much as about other cultures.
- Intentional actions that help you expand your intercultural engagement include being curious, being

open to listening, embracing difference, asking questions and being ready to share from your own culture, showing respect, avoiding passing judgement, and being genuine.

Try These Strategies

- Train yourself to continuously ask questions, reflect, and try to understand other perspectives, just as you did in the activity above.
- Put yourself in different situations while you watch a movie, listen to someone's story, or read the news. Try doing a mental roleplay, this will help you get used to seeing things from different perspectives, encourage you to ask questions, and ultimately help you further develop your critical thinking skills.
- Whenever you are interacting interculturally, remember to focus on listening. Avoid passing judgement and avoid asking too many questions.
- Always leave room for others to tell their story on their own and to ask you questions as well. Respect people's privacy; some aspects of their lives may not be easy to share or discuss.
- When watching videos or hearing people's stories, such as Truepayna's, take this as an opportunity to help you guide and expand your knowledge about the countries involved. Also, learn to appreciate other people's experiences. For example, learn more about what happened in Burma: Why did people have to flee to Thailand? What is the situation now?
- Reflect on the way learning about other experiences and histories influence the way you feel about others. What has this experience taught you? What has this prepared you to do?
- Identify ways to be better at, for example, asking questions, clarifying something, showing interest to continue interacting with people without appearing pushy. Focus on meeting people where they are.

Self-Assessment

About This Module

This module focused on helping you identify further strategies and develop intercultural skills that will continue to expand as you become an interculturally-minded individual. Key components in this module highlighted the importance of continuous intercultural development fostering transferable competencies. The content concentrated on the skills of listening and observing to practice taking information while avoiding relying on preconceptions. You practiced skills associated with critical thinking and evaluating as cognitive strategies to create meaning and enhance understanding of intercultural behaviours and events. Additionally, you explored strategies for connecting and communicating with others and developing empathy as skills to support your engagement across contexts.

About the Self-Assessment

The following self-assessment will help you apply skills associated with observation, listening, thinking critically, and evaluating; it will help you put into practice what you have learned about cultural empathy and relationship-building. You will be able to identify ways to interact with cultural others by paying attention to how to communicate to minimize misunderstandings in addition to demonstrating your understanding of intercultural competencies and identifying strategies to continue developing skills.

As you prepare to do this self-assessment, keep in mind the following:

- Engage with the self-assessment without rushing, take time to think about the questions and situations.
- Ensure you answer all questions to maximize your learning process and allow you to think more critically about issues and situations.
- Instead of a mark, you will be able to see feedback (sample responses) for each item that will support your understanding of the content.
- Enjoy completing your self-assessment! It is a great way to summarize what you learned in this module.

Self-Assessment

Part 1: Understanding Concepts

Read the following statements and match them with the concept they are describing [7 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-89>

Part 2: Demonstrating Understanding

Answer the following questions related to the content you explored in this module and provide examples as required to demonstrate your understanding [15 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-90>

Part 3: Understanding Perspectives

Decide whether the following statements are True or False [10 points].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-91>

Part 4: Making Changes

Explore the images and read the descriptions provided for each one. Identify the issues with each description and indicate how it could be changed to be fairer, more accurate, and more objective. [12 points]



Sparrow, J. (2020).

Description: Young Muslim ethnic couple shopping at a supermarket.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-92>



RODNAE Productions.

Description: *Teacher scolding a Black girl in front of the class.*



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-93>



Pixabay. (2016).

Description: *Buddhist monks in an Asian country parading on the street while people clap.*



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-94>



Green, A. (2020).

Description: *An irritated Black woman talking and gesturing.*



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-95>

Part 5: Practical Applications

Read the following situations and answer the question provided in each one of them. Make sure to rely on different skills and strategies that may help in each case. [16 points]



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcompetence/?p=1506#h5p-96>

Media Attributions

Sparrow, J. (2020). Happy Couple Buying Groceries. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/happy-couple-buying-groceries-4199043/>

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Your Intercultural Development Journey

Your Intercultural Development Journey

Whether you have completed one, two, or all three modules, you have taken steps towards developing your intercultural competencies. The combination of all three modules provides you with a strong basis to continue developing your competencies through self-awareness, expanding your knowledge, and identifying skills that will help you continue along this lifelong process. What you need to do is to open yourself to possibilities and make the best of a two-way engagement with cultural others.

What Do You Need To Remember?

In order to develop intercultural competence, you need to become more aware of your own culture and how your perceptions, the stereotypes and biases you hold about others affect how you interact with and respond to them. You can gain intercultural knowledge by socializing around people's food, music, language, and festivities, but even more importantly, you gain cultural insights through interactions and conversations that allow you and others to share perspectives of issues, to learn about behaviours, and to appreciate their history and experiences.

Intercultural skills are developed throughout time, the key to enhancing your abilities are your interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds, you do not need to go abroad to have real experiences if you focus on the people around you. Through meaningful interactions, you are not only learning about others to appreciate cultural differences and similarities, but you are also contributing to strengthening the social fabric. People can learn about you as much as you can learn about others.

Intercultural competence is a journey, a process, and a combination of multiple experiences throughout your life that have an influence in your personal and professional development. The more interculturally competent you become, the more you will understand the world around you. You do not lose anything by learning about others, you gain by learning about them and finding ways to appreciate people, to preserve cultures. You do not have to wait for something to happen, for an opportunity to come to you to engage interculturally or for someone to come and tell you about their experiences across cultures, in a new culture, or within a culture, all of which can be new, different, interesting, hard to hear, and even difficult to process, but it is all part of developing your understanding of others, while also helping others be more appreciative of difference and life experiences.

Awareness, Knowledge, And Skills For Life

Your genuine engagement in these modules can help you become a better intercultural communicator and value the interconnectedness each one of us shares with others within a single or multiple cultures. More importantly, through your continued efforts to expand your knowledge, gain perspectives, and focus on skills development, you will be able to approach anti-racism with more intentionality, equity with more understanding, diversity with greater appreciation, and inclusion with more authenticity.

The opportunities are already around you. Make the best of your journey, embrace the challenges, the learnings, the connections, the mistakes and clarifications, embrace difference, ask questions, understand yourself as a member of one or more cultures, be intentional, be an example, a leader, and supporter, and more than anything be an endless learner: *Make this a way of life.*



Plenio, J. (2018). Road in Between Grass Field. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/road-in-between-grass-field-1423597/>

Glossary

Glossary

Active listening	Ability to focus completely on a speaker to understand their message and respond thoughtfully. It involves using verbal and nonverbal techniques to show interest and keep the attention on the speaker.
Bias (unconscious bias)	An unsupported judgement, an automatic association in our brain that demonstrates underlying attitudes in favour or against other people. It happens outside our conscious awareness and affects how we relate to and react to others.
Critical thinking	The ability to analyse behaviours, events, and observations to understand, relate to, create meaning, address an issue, or find solutions. It requires you to be objective and understand different perspectives and then reflect on them in relation to your own experience.
Cross-cultural (e.g., communication, studies, or interactions)	Involves comparisons of different cultures around a particular aspect; for example, work values in Switzerland and in Saudi Arabia, or how people greet each other in Canada and in Spain.
Cultural awareness	Cultural awareness refers to the conscious understanding of one's own culture and how this differs from other cultures. Key to developing intercultural awareness is recognizing that the differences exist, without using one or another culture as a benchmark to judge other cultures. Cultural awareness is also a mindset supporting the continuous development of intercultural competencies.
Cultural humility	A lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing power imbalances [...] and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 123).
Cultural orientations (or dimensions)	Generalizations or archetypes that allow us to study general tendencies of a cultural group. This is helpful when we are trying to understand how the majority of the people in a cultural group tend to act or tend to think.
Cultural universals	Human activities, organizational patterns, characteristics, or traits that are common to all societies around the world.
Cultural Values	Deeply held beliefs that we rely on to determine what is "good, right, acceptable, and desirable" and what is "bad, wrong, unacceptable, and undesirable."
Culture	An accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviours, shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems (Neuliep, 2006, p. 21).
Discrimination	An action, the unjust or unfair treatment of a person or a group on the grounds of their identity, for instance, based on race, sex, ability, or origin. Discrimination starts with an inaccurate idea of a group based on a single observation (stereotype), which is repeated thus creating immediate associations in one's brain associations based on that observation (bias). The result of this affects how we perceive another group and the decisions that negatively affect that group.
Empathy	Action of understanding, being aware of, appreciating, and connecting with the experiences, circumstance, and feelings of others. It involves the use of strategies to share understanding and connecting with another person.
Ethnocentrism	The belief that one's culture is better or superior to others, that the way we do things is right, and the way others do things, act, or behave are wrong. It is a very limiting view that leads people to make unfair assumptions about other cultural groups and impedes the appreciation of different ways of being and behaving.
Evaluating	The ability to explore and consider various explanations for what is new or different to us and deciding what may be the best way to interpret it. It is part of a process that may require gathering more information to create meaning we can understand.
Global learner	A person who develops skills to appreciate other perspectives and intentionally engages with cultural others, seeks to expand knowledge across national and regional lines, and is aware of ways to deal with biases and stereotypes by suspending judgement of others. The ideal global learner is a person committed to engaging with cultural others at home and abroad; it is someone who recognizes the importance of understanding cultural differences and similarities, is centred on creating connections, improving relationships, learning about others, respecting people's experiences, and aims to continue developing their intercultural competencies.
Iceberg theory (Culture iceberg)	Visual representation developed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1976) to explain how at the top of the iceberg there are cultural elements that are easier to understand, they are learned or acquired consciously, involving our immediate senses (e.g., food, music, dress, rituals, accents, and greetings). At the bottom of the iceberg, there are elements learned or acquired unconsciously, they are hard to change, intangible, and one cannot understand without having more in-depth knowledge of another culture (e.g., values, concept of death, approaches to marriage, sexuality, and ageing, family organization, and rules of courtship).
Intercultural (e.g., competence, communication, engagement)	Focuses on a deeper understanding of interactions between cultures and the mutual exchange of ideas from a more holistic and comprehensive perspective.
Intercultural competence	The ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2006, p. 241).
Intercultural knowledge	A set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts (Bennet, 2008, p. 97).
Intersectionality	Based on Kimberlé Crenshaw's Theory of Intersectionality (1989), the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines intersectionality as "the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups."
Microaggression	A subtle, but offensive comment or action (including nonverbal expressions) directed generally at an individual or non-dominant group based on a bias or stereotype.
Nonverbal communication	The communication we use every day that includes everything that is not said in words, but that conveys a message between people that expresses intention, identity, some cultural orientations, values, and so on. For example, pointing, winking, shaking hands, physical distancing, facial expressions, and so on.

Objective observation	The ability to use our senses as a spectators, eyewitnesses, or participants focused on what happens around (actions and behaviours), noticing details, taking in new information, and being able to describe them without added judgement based on our reactions and value systems.
OSEE tool	Developed by Darla Deardorff (2012), this is a tool for creating objective descriptions and alternative explanations that lead into a better understanding of an event or situation. The tool includes the following steps: O – Observe (and listen to) what is happening, S – State objectively what is happening, E – Explore different explanations for what is happening, E – Evaluate which explanation(s) is the most likely one(s).
Prejudice	Preconceived opinion of a group that is not based on reason or derived from experience through interactions. This is the result of relying on unfair representations of a group, giving way to attitudes and actions that directly affect members of the group.
Stereotype	An overgeneralization of a perceived behaviour applied to an entire group based on limited observations or an oversimplification of ideas. Stereotypes can support a vicious circle of false beliefs directed at different cultural groups while creating a social stigma among those very groups.
Sociolinguistic knowledge	This refers to learning another language to communicate with speakers of that language and to better understand how the language reflects socio-cultural norms and interactions; it also refers to knowledge about other languages to better understand how people communicate and how each language's norms, the type of interaction, and one's heritage affect the way we speak.
Sympathy	Act of commiserating with someone else's feelings or struggles in a way that whatever affects one person will affect the other. It involves a shared mental state instead of developing an understanding.

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With thanks,

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