

Module 2: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Basic Module – English

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1. What does intercultural communication have to do with language instruction?

Intercultural communication occurs whenever people from different cultural backgrounds engage in dialogue with one another. Due to migration and increasing globalization, we are also experiencing changes within the education system. Young people from a wide variety of backgrounds with different linguistic abilities, religious and social upbringings, and interests are learning together. On the one hand, the content and teaching methods used in working with these young people must be adapted and innovated. On the other hand, there is a growing need for knowledge about other cultures and societies, as well as foreign language skills and intercultural competencies skills that have not been sufficiently taught in an educational system that has traditionally been shaped by the concept of the nation-state.

Promoting oral communication skills and intercultural competence are indeed cross-curricular and subject-specific tasks of pedagogy and thus of all academic disciplines. However, language instruction certainly plays a particularly important role in fostering oral expression and conversational skills, as well as in developing cultural and methodological competencies in the use of spoken language. This presents several challenges for teachers. Let's consider a situation from language instruction:

At Marlen's new school, the classes are very diverse, not only socially but also culturally. As part of a project, she has formed small groups, but the work in the groups is progressing very slowly:

Jana is working with two exchange students from Australia - Matt and Craig - and with Xu, who joined the class a few weeks ago. Her parents took jobs in the electronics industry and moved from China to Europe for that reason. The atmosphere in the group is good at first. At the first meeting, Jana advocates for assigning specific tasks: she herself will summarize the most important points from the reading material, Craig will come up with the practical example, Matt will create the presentation, and Xu will present the whole thing. At the second meeting, the group realizes that no one has made much progress yet. Matt points out that, after all, he has to take advantage of the great recreational activities during his exchange year. Xu acts distant, and Craig constantly strays from the topic. Jana is annoyed that no one but her seems to take

the assignment seriously. She voices her dissatisfaction, and arguments break out within the group.

In a rapidly changing world of migration, cultural boundaries are blurring and disappearing. Approaches to cultural standards or cultural dimensions give the impression that cultures can be systematically analyzed and categorized—with results that suggest homogeneity. However, this is not the case.

When interpreting and attributing causes to students' behavior, it is important not to jump to hasty and one-sided conclusions. For example, simplistically attributing behavior to culture (as our colleague did in our example) can lead to other possible explanations not being considered at all. This is because cultural practices and discourses, as well as personality traits and situational contexts, are variables that can change. It is therefore advisable to remain open to different explanatory models of behavior and, consequently, open to how to address them. This also includes being open to learning more about the underlying reasons for behaviors, as well as acquiring a basic understanding of the dimensions of intercultural communication.

The goal of this module is to provide you with a basic introduction to the topic of “Intercultural Communication.” Some parts of the module will fall under the category of “Knowledge and Recognition,” while others will focus on “Reflection and Evaluation.” The “Action and Design” aspect will then be addressed in the advanced module. Throughout the module, frequent reference will be made to the critical incident just presented. The overview provided on Worksheet 1 will help you navigate the module.

2. What is culture?

To get a more detailed understanding of the concept of culture and your own cultural practices, norms and values, please work through the following task (cf. <https://practice-school.eu/de/exercise-1-cultural-tree-exercise-for-self-reflection/>).

Task:

Draw a tree on worksheet 2 that represents your own personal culture. Try to find terms for the following three parts of the tree that represent your own cultural background, and write them next to the tree. Allow yourself 10 minutes.

- **Roots** = terms that express your origins, your feeling of belonging to cultural groups
- **Trunk** = terms that represent relevant values for you from your own cultural context
- **Leaves** = terms that express the visible signs of your personal culture (e.g. terms from your culinary culture, cultural celebrations etc.)

Once you have completed this part, please think about the following questions. Allow yourself 5-10 minutes for this.

- Was it easy to define the cultural group to which you feel you belong? Did you choose more than one group?
- Do you believe that the values and symbols that you chose are “typical” of your cultural origins?
- Do you feel at ease with the visible part of your cultural background, or would you rather keep it more “invisible”? Why? In which situations?
- What might the culture tree of your class at school look like?

After you have thought about the questions, please read the following explanations relating to this exercise (cf. <https://practice-school.eu/de/exercise-1-cultural-tree-exercise-for-self-reflection/>).

Cultural identity is not the same as nationality or ethnicity

Maybe you put your national or ethnic origin in the roots part of your tree or the town or region where you currently live or grew up. It is sure to have been difficult for you to define a particular cultural group in itself. That isn't surprising, as we belong to many different cultural groups. Cultural identity is not just determined by national culture. People have a multifaceted cultural identity and can also consciously decide to adopt or reject cultural practices.

Culture is dynamic and changeable

You might feel that your cultural background and values have changed during your life (e.g. values from your family tradition vs. values in your later adult life, or changes to cultural traditions after moving). Culture is dynamic and changeable: we are in a constant learning process in conflict with the culture that surrounds us. Culture transforms with people and culture transforms very quickly, especially in a world that is shaped by globalization.

Culture can be associated with stereotypes

When we encounter people from other cultures, we often come to conclusions about their possible behavior or their values from the "visible" part of their culture. These assumptions can distort our perception. The consequences are stigmatization, stereotyping and, in the worst case, even discrimination. Especially (but not only) when there is a high level of cultural diversity in your school, you should continuously reflect upon your own perception of different cultural groups.

3. What does the iceberg model of cultures say?

Using what is known as the “iceberg model of cultures”, science attempts to illustrate how the visible and invisible elements of culture interact.

Task:

Watch the explanatory video and enter the elements that seem particularly important to you in the free fields on worksheet 3.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ_ZvINyqFQ

We tend to equate culture with national identity and to cite supposed cultural affiliation as the primary explanation for the behavior of people from different cultural backgrounds. In doing so, we overlook the fact that behavior is always influenced by multiple factors that (to stick with the iceberg model) are either visible or invisible and interact with one another in complex ways. That is why it is advisable to learn more about the underlying reasons for certain behaviors. The following additional information about some of the students in Marlen’s class shows that it was contextual factors in particular - in interaction with cultural and personality traits - that led to a specific behavior.

Xu has recently taken on the role of presenter in other projects and is not particularly eager to give another presentation. However, because she believes it is in the best interest of the group’s outcome, she accepts the task. She does not want to question Marlen’s proposed approach.

Matt’s girlfriend is upset with him because he’s spending a year abroad, even though they had other plans together. He now feels guilty and is having trouble focusing on his schoolwork. He distracts himself by playing sports and spending time with friends.

Craig is frustrated because he can’t find a good case study for the project. He actually sees himself as a creative person, and he’s having a hard time admitting to himself and the group that he’s currently stuck on the assignment on his own.

Jana recently had a bad experience in another group project. She learned from that experience that planning, assigning tasks and roles, and clear agreements are necessary to avoid conflicts and a poor outcome. She actually prefers to approach things spontaneously and casually, but because she urgently needs a good grade, she wants to do everything right this time.

4. What does “intercultural communicative competence” mean?

Before we look in detail at the subcomponents that make up “intercultural communicative competence”, we need to explain the terms “interculturality”, “intercultural communication” and “intercultural competence”.

Interculturality

The term “interculturality” is not clearly differentiated from the terms “multiculturality” and “transculturality” either in general language use or in academic discourse. To some extent, the terms are also used synonymously. All three terms are descriptive categories for various forms of cultural encounter.

“Multicultural” describes a tolerant, but non-binding co-existence of people of different origins. Multiculturality is a “state of polycultural cohabitation of different individuals, groups and ways of life” (Schröder 2009: 47).

“Transcultural” means the “removal of existing differences to create something new distinct from the contrasting pair of “own culture” and “foreign culture” (Schröder 2009: 48) that results from the interaction between cultures.

“Intercultural” refers to the differences, commonalities, processes, exchange and conflicts between cultures. Interculturality “as a way of thinking and acting ‘in between’” comprises “above all interactions (interferences), mutual dependencies (interdependencies) and mutual penetration of barriers and contacts” (Demorgon/Kodes 2006: 34). Culture transfer does not take place in a one-sided way, but rather reciprocally, so that not a synthesis, but instead synergies (can) come about.

Intercultural communication

“Intercultural communication” as a scientific discipline (or subdiscipline) in psychology, sociology and pedagogy emerged in the 1960s in the United States and Canada. The challenges arising from immigration and the development of a multicultural society provided the crucial impetus. The term “intercultural communication” was coined by the US ethnologist and behavioral researcher, E.T. Hall, who introduced the importance of non-verbal communication in intercultural situations to a broader scientific public in his work, “The Silent Language” (1959).

In Europe, corresponding intercultural questions have developed since the 1980s above all in Germany, France and Scandinavia.

Under “intercultural communication” we understand the communicative dimension of relationships between members of different cultures. Intercultural communication is particularly relevant as a subject of research and investigation when large and important cultural differences give rise to different interpretations and expectations of competent communication. A distinction can be drawn between two levels here.

The one level (=field of face-to-face communication and interaction) is tangential to the direct interaction in the dialog between members of different cultures and includes forms of verbal and non-verbal means (gestures, body movements, inflection) (cf. Litters 1995).

The other level (= a more broadly formulated concept of intercultural communication) includes, alongside interpersonal interaction, the level of mediatized intercultural communication in its different facets (cf. Lüsebrink 2016). Advertisements, print media formats or media genres such as talk shows or reality shows are adapted to the specific standards and communication forms of different cultures and their transformation process is analyzed.

Intercultural competence

In the following video, “Intercultural Competence” is defined as the interaction between different key qualifications. The model used is that of Jürgen Bolten (2007), which considers the way in which our perception, thinking and action are bound to our culture, and which calls for a relativizing approach to the foreign and the familiar. “Intercultural competence” is not seen as something static and self-contained but instead as a skill that continues to evolve through discourse and interactions with other areas of competence.

Task:

Watch the video. Enter the five key qualifications of “Intercultural Competence” according to Bolten in the free fields on worksheet 4.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToOiAiqEvrE>

Intercultural communicative competence

“Intercultural communication competence” is defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures (Arasaratnam 2009). This definition is not unproblematic, as the conceptualization of “culture”, as we have seen, is in itself highly complex, and both within a culture as well as between cultures there is a certain degree of variability and difference. Furthermore, it is not clear if intercultural communication competence is transferable across all contexts. It may have been determined that certain features increase the probability of intercultural communicative competence, but the relational and situative context of the communication is also important. Communication competence is therefore less an individual attribute and more a feature of the relationship between people. Nevertheless, there are certain features that are connected with intercultural communicative competence. The Arasaratnam/Doerfel study (2005) suggests that five particular characteristics are associated with intercultural communicative competence: 1) empathy, 2) intercultural experience/training, 3) motivation, 4) global mindset and 5) the ability to listen well in conversations. These factors largely agree with those that are named as intercultural competences in models.

In foreign language didactics in particular, for decades the model devised by Michael Byram (1997) has become established, and the “Common European Reference Framework for Languages” (European Council 2021, sections 2.1 and 5.1) also refer to it. Byram differentiates between five knowledge areas (French “savoirs”) of intercultural competence which are located on cognitive, affective, volitional and ethical levels and are interlinked with one another.

Remarks:

“savoir”: orientational and basic knowledge when dealing with foreign cultural forms of expression

“savoir faire”: capacity to acquire new knowledge and to operate in situations that are characterized by cultural differences and misunderstandings

“savoir être”: curiosity and openness towards reflecting upon one’s own attitudes, questioning one’s own values, showing empathy and accepting cultural diversity,

“savoir s’engager”: ability to critically evaluate one’s own and the foreign culture

“savoir apprendre/comprendre”: ability to engage in lifelong intercultural learning

Byram's model provides for the addition of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, which together with intercultural competence make up "intercultural communicative competence", which, according to the model, can be acquired not only in the classroom, but also in other learning venues outside of education and through independent learning. Extensive information on Byram's model can be found in the essay by Byram et al. (2002) provided.

Criticism of Byram's model has been expressed from many quarters. What is striking in this case - as in many other intercultural competence models from the time - is the "dichotomous contrasting of the personal with a foreign culture and the problem-oriented focusing on cultural differences and misunderstandings" (Rösch, 2017: 147). Based on a dynamic and changeable concept of culture, as we defined it in the beginning, these terms would need to be redefined, at least with each critical assessment of the specific situation. Otherwise, this perspective promotes a xenological and culturalizing observation of others and, above all in the field of foreign language didactics, with such an idealized description of intercultural competence, above all ignores cultural interdependences and a critical view of power (cf. Rösch 2017: 147f). Therefore it is important to take into account the criticism proffered by Mecheril (2002) that these models only consider a domestic perspective, but that it is important to introduce a certain change of perspective between a majority (teaching, managing, member of the global north etc.) and/or minority perspectives (learner, employee, member of the global south etc.). If stereotyping or culturalization has occurred, it is not then sufficient to empathize with the person concerned or to argue morally and pedagogically. Rather, it is necessary to reflect upon the backgrounds to and effects of such processes. The same applies to "othering" and "silencing" processes. Making them taboo promotes their prohibition, but does not deconstruct and overcome them.

The challenge remains to not reinforce lines of difference in discourse but rather to critically reflect upon them. An alternative concept to the intercultural perspective is offered by the diversity approach (which came about in the context of the US civil rights movement against racism and for equality of opportunity. Since the end of the 1990s "diversity" has been a guiding principle of the European Union), which places the power discourse center stage along individual and also intersectionally connected lines of difference, so that culture stands as only one line of difference among others.

However, for this approach too, it is important to ensure that a critical approach to the thematization and dethematization of lines of difference (in the case of intercultural competence focused on culture) “presupposes a reflexivity of perspective that supports the awareness of different perspectives (including one’s own) in their historical, power-critical and future-oriented context” (Rösch 2017: 151). Rösch therefore speaks of a “competence triad” of “knowledge, ability and awareness”. It consists of the knowledge of cultural interdependencies, the ability to shape interactions (inter)culturally and the awareness of interculture as a form of life and society.

5. Why is “intercultural communication” important when learning a foreign language?

Misunderstandings in teaching and learning contexts hamper learning, especially when they cannot be addressed and resolved due to power structures or cultural practices. Since, in addition, foreign languages are used in situative and application-related contexts that are responsible not only for interpersonal understanding but also in some circumstances for professional and financial decisions, the aspect of “intercultural communication” must be considered very carefully when learning foreign languages.

Three aspects are examined more closely below:

1. How do misunderstandings arise in non-verbal communication?
2. How do misunderstandings arise in verbal communication?
3. Which categories of analysis help to avoid misunderstandings in teaching situations?

5.1 How do misunderstandings arise in non-verbal communication?

In every situation, people send out signals and react to signals from other people. Even looking away or saying nothing are forms of communication! The majority of the signals and messages that people send out are unconscious and not intended. We may be able to control some of our body language, but this skill decreases from top (head) to bottom (feet). Non-verbal means of communication include a whole range of parameters that support or replace the spoken word, express emotions or interpersonal attitudes and can be used by people for wholly different purposes. Non-verbal means of communication include:

- eye movement and eye contact
- movement in space
- touches and body contact
- voice and paralinguistic stimuli (intonation, accent, tempo, smiling etc.)
- silence
- body language (positioning of shoulders, arms, hands, legs, feet)

- posture
- gestures
- facial expressions

The decoding of these non-verbal means of communication is subject to a high degree of error. Lewis (2000) differentiates between linear-active, multi-active and reactive cultures. So as not to misunderstand people as representatives of a culture, we do not, however, compare cultures below, but rather individuals' characteristics. It is also important to consider that people may combine different communicative characteristics and therefore no 1:1 correlation can be justified. Whilst linear-active people, for example, tend to prefer large distances to their interlocutors in business meetings, multi-active people seek out proximity to their counterpart and use body language in a demonstrative way. Reactive people, in turn, use silence as a means of communication, because through their silence they believe they are making a valuable contribution to a discussion. According to Lewis (2000), linear-active people are especially attentive when it comes to absorbing facts (data-oriented people), multi-active people, in contrast, need the personal relationship to absorb contextual information and for networking - they like to have the opportunity to discuss things (dialog-oriented people). Reactive people listen intensively and are able to absorb both information relating to the individual and facts (listening-oriented people). The same individual non-verbal means of communication can therefore be used and interpreted quite differently. Also added to this is that even if the facial expressions for the most important feelings (happiness, surprise, fear, sadness, anger, disgust, interest) as well as laughing and crying look the same the world over, the conventions for displaying or suppressing them can differ greatly.

Task:

Assign the following characteristics to the communication types in accordance with Lewis (2000).

linear-active	multi-active	reactiv
data/task-oriented	dialog-oriented	listening-oriented
patient	impatient	patient
quiet, reserved	talkative, sociable	silent, listening attentively
sticks to plans	alters plans	alters plans slightly
argues logically	argues emotionally	avoids controversy
limited body language	rich body language	subtle body language
factual	emotional	solicitous interest
one thing at a time	many things all at once	reacts spontaneously
interrupts only rarely	interrupts frequently	does not interrupt

5.2 How do misunderstandings arise in verbal communication?

For communication to succeed, being able to decode a spoken message as accurately as possible is critical. However, coding and decoding is susceptible to failure, which is why misunderstandings can arise.

The psychological communication model, “four sides of a message” (1981) or the “four-ears model” (1991) devised by Friedemann Schulz von Thun is one of the best known and shows the complexity of communication (see worksheet 6).

In the case of a message (“Hey, it’s green up ahead!”) directed by a sender to a receiver, not only is a fact conveyed (1st side = fact = “the traffic light is on green”) but also statements are made about the relationship to the person (2nd side = relationship = “You need my help!”) and about one’s own self (3rd side = self-revelation = “I’m in a hurry!”) as well as an appeal being made (4th side = appeal = “Step on it!”), which is supposed to encourage the receiver

to undertake a particular action. Misunderstandings arise because as a rule only the factual content is expressed verbally, the other sides only non-verbally, which makes it harder for the receiver to decode the message. When people with different practices and communication styles interact, it is – quite apart from the linguistic hurdles when it comes to understanding the factual content - even more difficult to identify and decode every side of a message. In the example given above, for example, there would need to be agreement on the fact that a “green” at the traffic lights entitles the driver to immediately drive over the crossing, that it is absolutely necessary and expected to arrive at an appointment punctually, that women/men are the better/worse drivers etc.

You can avoid or quickly resolve misunderstandings if you are aware of the different communication styles and are open to other communication styles and do not assume your own value concepts and practices to be set/the norm. When teaching a foreign language it is important to be able react appropriately to individual communication styles and to take them into account for learning.

5.3 Which categories of analysis help to avoid misunderstandings in teaching situations?

Each intercultural communication situation is shaped by the speaking and action conventions of one’s interlocutor which may be modified and altered in the course of communication depending on the situation. Inadequate interpretations of the behavior of the communication partner, for example by falling back on stereotypical, psychologizing interpretations (such as “typically over the top German lover of order” or “typical French improvisation”) may lead to misunderstandings, to one’s communication partner being upset and even to the communication ceasing. Müller-Jacquier (1999) developed an analysis matrix consisting of ten components to facilitate a differentiated analysis of the requirements for and the course of communication situations. Worksheet 7 contains a summary for you.

Task:

Go through the individual components of Müller-Jacquier's analysis matrix and make a note of examples of the individual aspects from your classroom experience on worksheet 7. It is not necessary to find an example for each aspect. Allow yourself 10-15 minutes. Then upload the completed worksheet to the course.

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WORKSHEETS: IC – Basic Module

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Worksheet 1: Overview of the module

Knowledge & Recognition	Reflect & Evaluate	Action & Design
	(1) What is culture? (15 min.)	
(2) What does the iceberg model of cultures say? (10 min.)		
(3) What does “intercultural communicative competence” mean? (20 min.)		
(4) Why is “intercultural communication” important when learning a foreign language? (15 min.)		

Worksheet 2: What is culture?

Task:

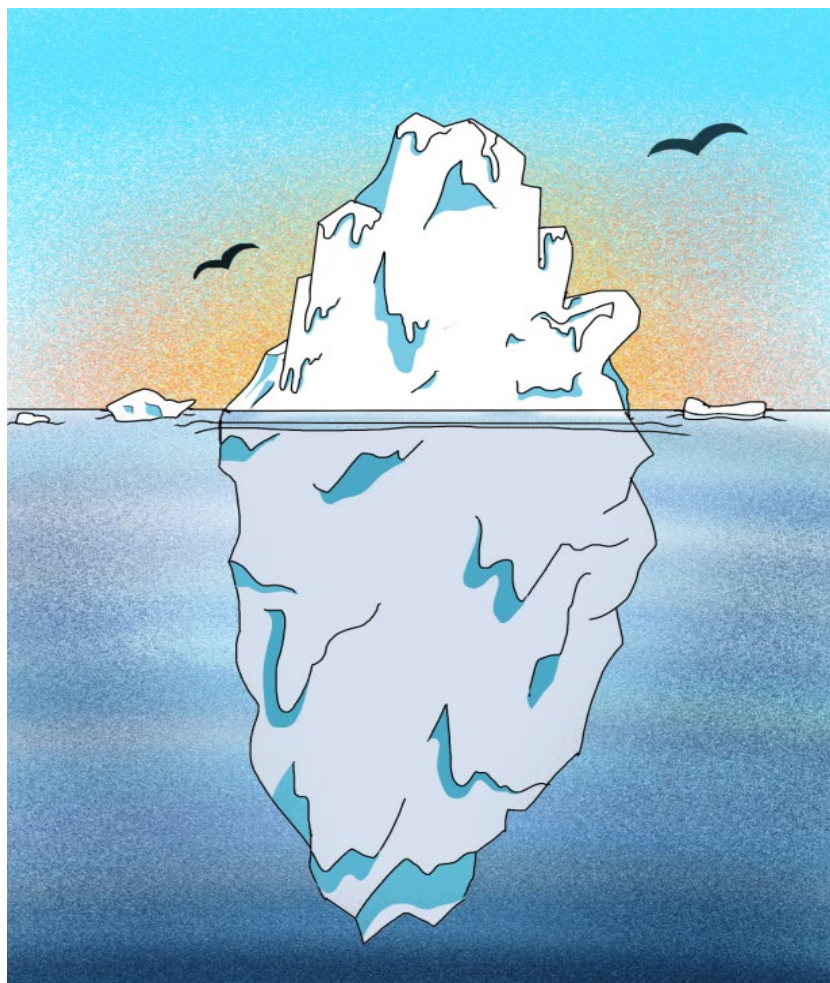
Draw a tree on worksheet 2 that represents your own personal culture. Try to find terms for the following three parts of the tree that represent your own cultural background, and write them next to the tree. Allow yourself 10 minutes.

- **Roots** = terms that express your origins, your feeling of belonging to cultural groups
- **Trunk** = terms that represent relevant values for you from your own cultural context
- **Leaves** = terms that express the visible signs of your personal culture (e.g. terms from your culinary culture, cultural celebrations etc.)

Worksheet 3: Iceberg Model of Cultures

Task:

Using what is known as the “iceberg model of cultures”, science attempts to illustrate how the visible and invisible elements of culture interact. Watch the explanatory video and enter the elements that seem particularly important to you in the free fields on this worksheet.

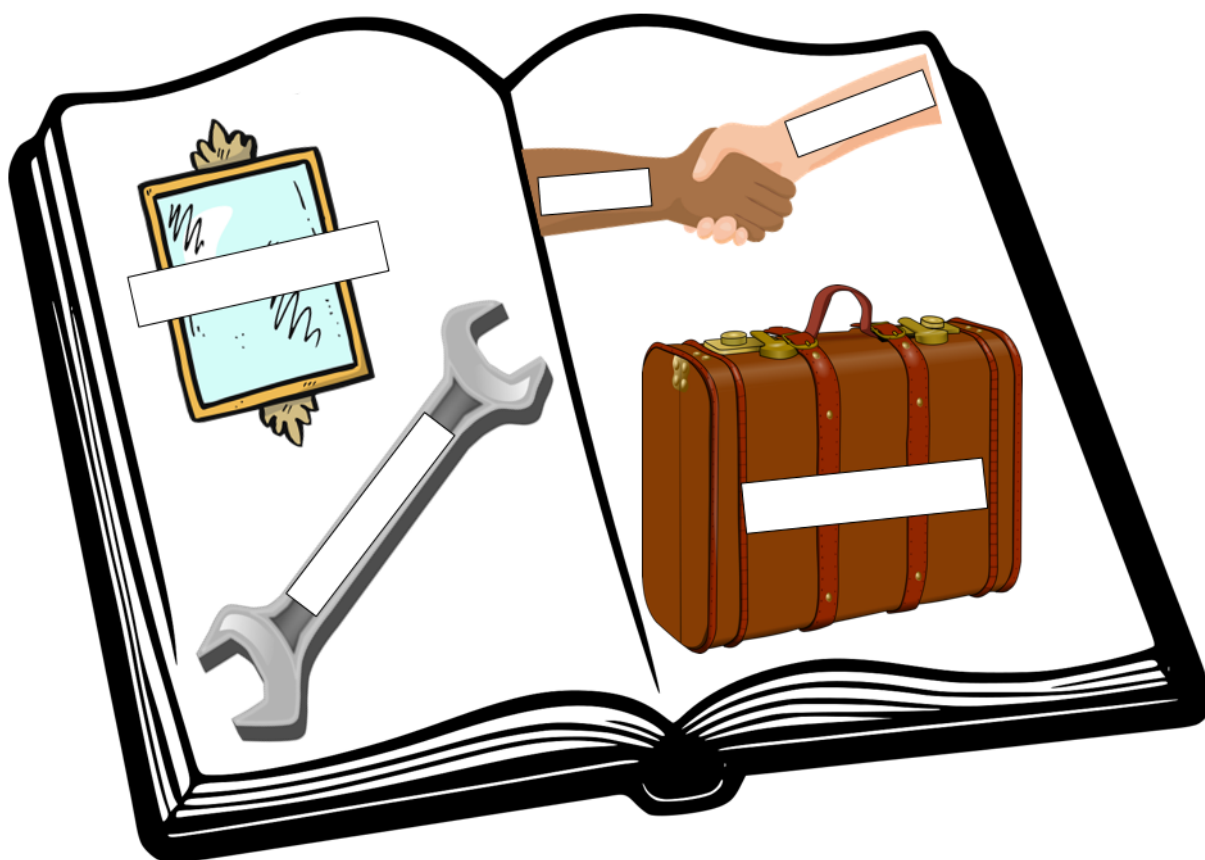


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Worksheet 4: Intercultural Competence

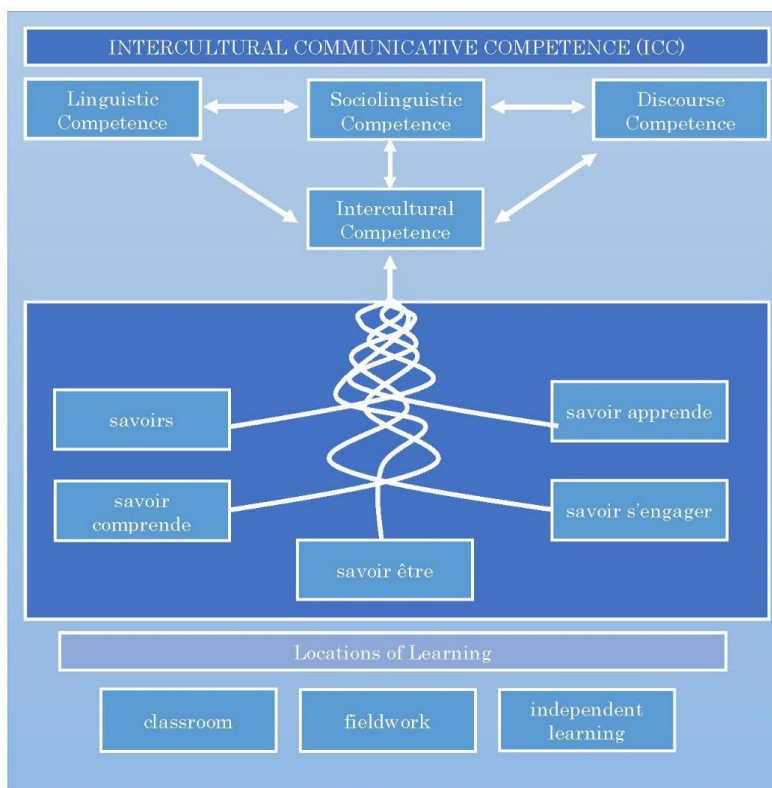
Task:

Watch the video. Enter the five key qualifications of “Intercultural Competence” according to Bolten in the free fields on this worksheet.



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Worksheet 5: Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram)



Remarks:

“savoir”: orientational and basic knowledge when dealing with foreign cultural forms of expression

“savoir faire”: capacity to acquire new knowledge and to operate in situations that are characterized by cultural differences and misunderstandings

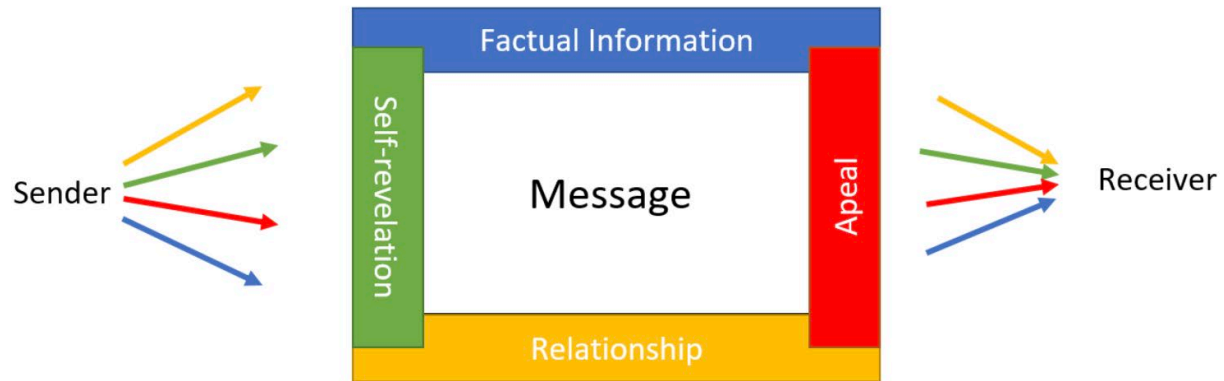
“savoir être”: curiosity and openness towards reflecting upon one’s own attitudes, questioning one’s own values, showing empathy and accepting cultural diversity,

“savoir s’engager”: ability to critically evaluate one’s own and the foreign culture

“savoir apprendre/comprendre”: ability to engage in lifelong intercultural learning

Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Worksheet 6: Four-Sides-Model (Schulz von Thun)



Schulz von Thun, F. (1981). Miteinander Reden (Bd. 1). Störungen und Klärungen: Allgemeine Psychologie der Kommunikation. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

Worksheet 6: Analysis Matrix (Müller-Jacquier)

Task:

Go through the individual components of Müller-Jacquier's analysis matrix and make a note of examples of the individual aspects from your classroom experience on this worksheet. Then upload the completed worksheet to the course.

1. Social meaning / lexicon:

- Lexical differences influence the acquisition of vocabulary.
- Social connotations of terms can cause misunderstandings.
- Culturally-influenced meanings can create confusion in educational contexts.

Example: in Germany, “Sunday” is associated with closed shops etc., but not in other countries.

2. Discourse acts / discourse act sequences:

- Cultural differences in discourse acts influence the type of communication.
- Pupils need to learn to recognize contexts for different discourse acts.
- Understanding of discourse act sequences improves the interaction in the foreign language.

Example: it is not always possible to clearly interpret agreements; for example the reply “Yes, if you like” in French has different cultural connotations than the direct German translation, “Yes, certainly!”

3. Conversation organization / conventions of discourse sequence:

- Different discourse structures require adaptation in educational settings.
- Cultural conventions influence the way in which ideas are organized and presented.
- Pupils should understand the expected conversation organization in different contexts.

Example: _____

4. Topics:

- Culturally sensitive topics require particular attention when learning a language.
- Pupils must learn how to speak appropriately about culturally relevant topics.
- The awareness of cultural differences in subjects helps to facilitate intercultural dialog.

Example: _____

5. Directness/indirectness:

- Understanding cultural preferences with regard to directness influences school communication.
- Pupils have to learn to adapt their communication depending on the cultural context.
- Differences in directness can prevent misunderstandings in interaction between pupils.

Example: _____
_____**6. Register:**

- Pupils should be able to master formal and informal linguistic styles in different contexts.
- Cultural differences in registers require a broad spectrum of linguistic skills.
- Understanding different registers enhances communicative competence.

Example: _____

7. Paraverbal factors:

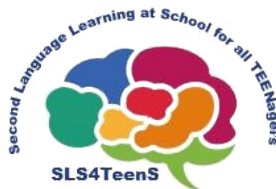
- Emphasis and inflection influence comprehensibility in the foreign language.
- Pupils must be able to recognize and use cultural nuances in pronunciation.
- An awareness of paraverbal factors improves oral communication.

Example: _____

8. Non-verbal factors:

- Cultural differences in gestures and facial expression influence the interpretation of statements.
- Differences in proxemics can influence the personal space and vary.
- Pupils must learn to understand non-verbal signals in different contexts.

Example: _____



9. Culture-specific values/attitudes:

- Awareness of culture-specific values makes it easier to adapt communication.
- Differences in values and attitudes influence pupil behavior and interactions.
- Pupils should learn to reflect upon their attitudes in the cultural context.

Example: _____

10. Culture-specific actions:

- Identification of typical actions facilitates adapted conduct in different situations.
- Pupils must understand how culture-specific actions in school contexts are interpreted.
- An awareness of culture-specific actions supports successful interactions in the foreign language.

Example: _____
