

Young Migrant Integration Leaders [EXEMPLAR]

IO1 – Integration Leaders Curriculum

Module 2: Intercultural Communication and Competence

Self-directed Learning Content

Introduction to the Module:

This is the second module of the Integration Leaders Curriculum. This module addresses the topic “Intercultural Awareness and Competence”, which includes definitions of important terms; an overview on how “culture” is understood and expressed; visible and invisible parts of culture; the process of self-identification; and, last but not least, the simulation of a meeting of two cultures, which challenges participants to find the key to interpreting cultural behaviour and how to cope with the culture shock phenomenon.

Learning Outcomes Achieved:	Knowledge: Recognise own cultural identity, as well as values, customs and interpretation schemata shaped by culture; recognise and appreciate differences and similarities in cultural behaviour, customs and values; interpret cultural behaviour, customs and values within context; interpret and understand non-verbal communication styles across cultures
	Skills: develop intercultural communication skills; distinguish between cultural and personal characteristics of people; perform self-reflective methods to uncover stereotypical assumptions; use empathy to facilitate understanding across cultural boundaries
	Attitudes: approach culturally ambiguous situations with an open mind and curiosity; use the gained knowledge and skills to bridge cultural boundaries; facilitate intercultural exchange; recognise and appreciate the human being beyond the cultural and social influences and characteristics

Unit 2.1 Cultural perception and identity

During the Integration Leader workshop, various definitions of the term “culture” were discussed as well as the visible and invisible parts of culture.

Culture is learned through socialisation, education, training and experience. It shapes our lifestyle and personal identity from the moment we are born. Culture is transmitted and learned through language, through gestures and non-verbal signals, through oral and written stories, and through personal experience. We experience culture visibly in material objects, arts and music, rituals and symbols, clothing and cuisine, but we also experience culture in a more subtle way by sharing beliefs about hierarchy, our understanding about acceptable behaviour,

our religion and basically rules, values, norms that are accepted by our social environment or even taboos that are frowned upon. We learn this by observing those around us – starting at a very early age – and copying what they do. As toddlers, we crave attention and positive reaction from our parents, so naturally we behave in an accepted way (at least most of the time). In relation to this, the documentation “Babies” (Balmès 2010) is highly recommended as it shows how four babies from four different cultures grow up during their first year and how their cultural and social environment shapes their experiences and identity.

From “outside”, a specific culture might seem homogenous, meaning it is the same for all members of the culture. But a closer look shows that culture is changing and evolving. This means that not even defined the same way by all members of a culture itself. Even if a group of people belongs to the same culture, this does not mean that they are a homogenous group concerning their beliefs and social norms. Our individual perception is important as well when communicating with people from different cultures and we need to keep a close look on the factors that influence our perception to avoid stereotypes (Babelissima 2015).

What is a stereotype?

It is the judgement or assumption you make about a person in relation to a certain characteristic such as their gender, their ethnicity, their culture and even their age. While there is the phenomenon of positive stereotypes (e.g. Asians are good at maths), stereotypes have negative consequences for the target most of the time. A stereotype can even become so strong that members of the stereotyped community start to believe them too and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Intercultural Competence and Communication

To understand how to communicate across cultures, it is important to encode the communication style that is used. There are two kinds of culture:

▶ **Low-context culture**

In this culture, members express what they want to say in an explicit way, meaning they use more words and are eager to explain exactly what they mean by repeating and rephrasing their point.

▶ **High-context culture**

In this culture, members express what they want to say in an implicit way, meaning they use less words and rely more on the context around the spoken or written word using non-verbal signals for example.

Watch these videos to learn more about how you can understand these types of culture:

- ▶ Tero Trainers. (2016, November 08). *What Is The Difference Between a High-Context and Low-Context Culture?* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/qKViQSnW-UA>
- ▶ The Lavin Agency Speakers Bureau. (2014, May 05). *Leadership Speaker Erin Meyer: Low Context vs. High Context Societies* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/9oYfhTC9IIQ>
- ▶ Carina Hofer. (2014, November 20). *Low context culture* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/nkSOPf3cuOI>
- ▶ Carina Hofer. (2014, November 20). *High context culture* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/UHgN2Ib27Yk>

- ▶ TEDx Talks. (2014, October 21). *Cross cultural communication | Pellegrino Riccardi | TEDxBergen*. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/YMyofREc5Jk>

Unit 2.2 Building Bridges

The second unit is covered completely by an interactive game that simulates the meeting of two very different cultures. It triggers a culture shock phenomenon based on the differences in cultural behaviour and encourages participants to develop successful coping strategies.

Setting:

There are two groups: Architects and Exemplarians, whereas the latter are a native tribe with a very distinct, yet unexplored culture. The architects are sent to the fictional land of Exemplaria to teach the natives how they could build a bridge to reach their market place in a quarter of the time they would need currently, cutting the time down from 2 days to a few hours. But the Exemplarians want to learn how they could build the bridge themselves, so the architects have to explain the process step-by-step.

The challenge is that the Exemplarians culture has distinct rules concerning communication and has strict gender-specific rules concerning the usage of tools, so some can only be used by men, some only by woman, and some by both. Exemplarians cannot explain their culture to outsiders, so architects have to discover the immanent rules of communication and adapt them in order to communicate successfully without being rude.

Learning Effect:

The game helps to understand differences between cultures and how difficult it could be to figure out culture specific rules, norms and behaviour. Both groups are pushed out of their comfort zone to accomplish a task together. The most important part of this game is the debriefing and reflexion after the task is finished in order to distinguish facts/observations from triggered feelings and interpretations. As everybody learns something different about themselves, personal notes during the discussion are encouraged.

The Exemplarian Game is based on the Derdian Game, published by the Council of Europe in the Intercultural Learning T-kit (2003).

Resources

- ▶ Balmès, T. (Director). (2010). *Babies* [Video file]. France: StudioCanal/Alain Chabat.
- ▶ Babelissima (2015, November 29). Intercultural Communication [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/SkBXaKfxl7Y>
- ▶ Martinelli, S., Gillert, A., Taylor, M., & Council of Europe. (2003). *Intercultural Learning T-kit (Derdian Game)*. Retrieved from <https://www.nonformality.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/03/derdians.pdf>
- ▶ Tero Trainers. (2016, November 08). *What Is The Difference Between a High-Context and Low-Context Culture?* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/qKViQSnW-UA>
- ▶ The Lavin Agency Speakers Bureau. (2014, May 05). *Leadership Speaker Erin Meyer: Low Context vs. High Context Societies* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/9oYfhTC9IIQ>
- ▶ Carina Hofer. (2014, November 20). *Low context culture* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/nkSOPf3cuOI>
- ▶ Carina Hofer. (2014, November 20). *High context culture* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/UHgN2Ib27Yk>
- ▶ TEDx Talks. (2014, October 21). *Cross cultural communication | Pellegrino Riccardi | TEDxBergen* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/YMyofREc5Jk>

Further reading:

- ▶ Community Tool Box. (2018). *Understanding Culture and Diversity in Building Communities*. Retrieved from <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/culture-and-diversity/main>
- ▶ Rewboss. (2014). *Culture shock: What to expect from it* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/D2mixQ_n_5E