Intercultural Training: Strategies for Uncovering our Cultural Lens and Navigating Cultural Interactions

Academic Success Centre
Red River College
Winnipeg
About your Workshop Facilitator

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Agenda

Session Learning Outcome:

Becoming more self-aware of our own cultural identities and how they can impact cross-cultural relationships in our library environments.

Session Key Concepts:

• Intercultural Competence and Diversity
• Cultural Identity
• Objective and Subjective Culture
• Cultural Values
• Communication Styles
Intercultural Competence

Classrooms, workplaces, communities are made up of people with complex and unique cultural identities.

**Intercultural Competence is the ability that help us to interact effectively and appropriately with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.**

By developing our intercultural competence, we foster our ability to recognize, acknowledge, respect and incorporate an understanding of worldviews and the impact on relationships.
Diversity Wheel

When talking about diverse cultural backgrounds...

Image Source: http://web.jhu.edu/dlc/resources/diversity_wheel
Reflection Activity:
Uncovering our cultural identity

Please take a couple of minutes to:

1. Write a word that you feel describes you, or it is a significant part of who you are, or how you choose to identify yourself to others.

2. Write how you think this aspect of your cultural identity influences your social interactions.
Unpacking Complex Cultural Identities

• Is there a cultural layer that people usually notice more, such as our visible gender, our generation, or the country we are from?

• When considering so many layers in our cultural identity, do we assign different weight to some of those layers? Which ones do we refer to more often?
From Individual to Communities

- Each one of us have our own **individual complex cultural identity**, our own cultural lens. In some way, each one of us is a culture of one.
- When looking at those many intersecting cultural layers in our own cultural identity, we realize that we belong to **many groups and communities with shared cultural experiences**.
Reflection Activity:
Broadening our understanding of culture

What things come to mind when you think about the word Culture?

What are some examples of Culture?
Objective Culture

Artifacts, institutions, and customs

Examples:
Food - Dress
Paintings - Music
Holiday customs
Religious rituals
Subjective Culture

Values and Beliefs

Examples:
Concept of Time
Teamwork
Leadership
The Intercultural Mindset

Your ability to recognize cultural differences and have a positive attitude toward them.

– The concept of **objective culture** is good for understanding the different histories of peoples and for appreciating the diversity of products they have created.

– The concept of **subjective culture** gives us more insight into people’s worldviews, and how different **cultural values** can result in differences in thinking, behaving or working. This insight translates into more effective intercultural interactions.

Reflection Activity: Mapping our cultural values

Let’s take a few minutes to identify some of our cultural values.

1. Review four pairs of cultural values (each represents the end points of a continuum).

2. Where do you see yourself?
Cultural Values

Task/Time

• I focus on the tasks I complete.
• I prioritize solving problems.
• I view time as a precious good and should not be wasted.

Relationship

• I focus on the relationships with my team members.
• I prioritize maintaining harmony.
• I view time as flexible.
Cultural Values

Individualism
• I view the needs of the individual as more important than the needs of the group.
• I have a sense of pride in being responsible for myself.

Collectivism
• I view the needs of the group as more important than the needs of the individual.
• I believe that looking out for others protects myself.
Cultural Values

**Equality**
- All people should be treated equally important.
- Respect must be earned.
- Everyone can question or confront respectfully.

**Hierarchy**
- Some people should be treated as more important than others.
- Respect must be demonstrated relative to position of authority.
- People should be treated according to their position.
Cultural Values

Risk and Change Tolerant
• I value change, and feel that it brings positivity in my life.
• I am willing to take risks in my personal life and work.
• I enjoy ongoing innovation and change.

Risk and Change Averse
• I am uncomfortable with risk and ambiguity.
• I am reluctant to take risks in my personal life and work.
• I prefer an environment with clear rules.
The Intercultural Skillset

Your ability to identify potential areas of misunderstanding and to choose behaviors appropriately.

– To navigate intercultural issues, it is important to distinguish between:

  **Intention**: other individuals’ meaning for their behaviours based on their cultural values

  **Perception**: our cultural lens assigning meaning to their actions

– Be aware to bridge the **cultural misperceptions** that may occur between people with different cultural orientations.

The Role of Culture in Communication

• Cultural assumptions and expectations influence the way we communicate in any social interaction.
• Our communication styles are influenced by our culture and personal preferences.
• Different communication styles show:
  – How we express our knowledge, ideas and opinions
  – How we receive, interpret and respond to messages
The role of culture in communication affects both verbal and non-verbal communication.

- **Verbal Communication**
  
  The explicit meaning of words
  
  What you say and how you say it

- **Non-Verbal Communication**
  
  Gestures, eye contact, body language, tone of voice
  
  What additional information and meaning is offered in addition to spoken (verbal) communication
Reflection Activity:
Identifying our communication styles

Let’s take a few minutes to identify our preferred communication styles.

1. Review four pairs of communication styles (each represents the end points of a continuum).

2. Where do you see yourself?
Communication Styles

Direct Style
• Communication is done using explicit verbal statements and represents exactly what the speaker means.

Indirect Style
• Meaning is communicated using indirect means, such as suggestions, body language, or pauses.
Communication Styles

Linear Style
• The communication progresses systematically along a straight line until the point is made.

Circular Style
• A discussion proceeds in a roundabout way and incorporates many details until the point is reached.
Communication Styles

Detached Style
• Issues are discussed with calmness and objectivity.

Attached Style
• Characterized by a high level of emotion.
Communication Styles

Idea-Oriented Style
• Disagreement with idea is stated directly, with the assumption that only the idea, not the person from whom the idea came, is being attacked.

Relationship-Oriented Style
• Disagreeing with an idea is viewed as being the same as disagreeing with the person who originated it.
Intercultural Sensitivity

Your ability to experience, acknowledge, appreciate and accept cultural differences.

- Intercultural Sensitivity is developmental. We can develop it by formal and informal learning, daily social interactions, life changes like immigration, travelling around the world, etc.

Hope this training added a few more steps in your intercultural sensitivity journey!

Strategies for an Intercultural Mindset

• To learn and understand other peoples’ cultural identities, **we need to learn and understand our own cultural identity first.**

• Our cultural identity is very complex; we belong to many different groups and cultures which influence who we are and how we see the world. **Allow individuals to use the language that resonates for them.**

• Look for both **visible cultural differences** and **invisible cultural differences** to manage intercultural interactions.
Strategies for an Intercultural Skillset

• Distinguish between intention (other individuals’ meaning for their behaviours) and perception (our cultural lens assigning meaning to their actions).

• Be aware to bridge the cultural misperceptions that may occur between people with different cultural values.

• If something unexpected happens, suspend quick judgements and analyze the situation from different perspectives.
Strategies for Intercultural Communication

• Cultural assumptions and expectations impact how we express our knowledge, ideas and opinions; and how we receive, interpret and respond to messages. Avoid judging other communication styles.

• You are always communicating even when you aren’t speaking. Be aware of your body language and tone of voice.

• Calibrate the amount of information, use of time, and display of emotions between your communication style and the other person’s.
References


• Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota. *Maximizing Study Abroad.*
For questions or more resources

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