Parents 4 all

Parents for All

KA2 Strategic Partnership for Innovation in Adult Education

Training material for the development of intercultural skills by parents

Unit 1: Basic intercultural skills

For parents from the host societies – abridged version

Contents

Training material for the development of intercultural skills by parents

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Parents4All training material!

As a parent, you want your children to succeed and make the most of their lives. This is what all parents want, independently of their origin. However, you may have sometimes wondered what is the best way to deal with the increasing cultural diversity within European societies. Will your children suffer damage from being exposed to values, cultures and practices different from that of your family? Is diversity good for your children or could it pose a threat to them? Many parents are concerned about these issues.

In the Parents4All partnership we believe that the only way to help *your* children prosper and succeed is to help *all* children in your environment do so. This training material explains how this is possible – how you can collaborate with other parents and with school staff to achieve intercultural understanding in school, combat racism and prejudice, and reap the rewards for you and your children. This training material is designed to make you more aware, to empower you, to inspire you, to provide you with the tools you need.

The material is structured in 2 units. Unit 1, *Basic Intercultural Skills*, helps parents to become more self-aware in cultural issues, develop more tolerance and acquire basic intercultural communication skills. Unit 2, *The Role of Parents in Social Inclusion and Cohesion,* provides parents with practical information that will help them to cultivate positive attitudes towards migrant integration and diversity, viewing parental engagement for social inclusion as a collaborative and mutually rewarding process.

More specifically, this document presents Unit 1. Chapter 1, *Self-perception and perception of the other,* explains key concepts related to the personal identity. Parents will understand the impact of culture and social context on self-perception and perception of the other and they will learn how to recognize and challenge their own stereotypes. Simple self-awareness raising techniques are introduced to help parents reflect on their own values, attitudes and behaviours.

Chapter 2, *Developing tolerance and understanding,* discusses the meaning and importance of tolerance and understanding in today's multicultural societies. Parents learn ways how to explore their own tolerance and to develop intercultural understanding in their children in a conscious, targeted way.

Chapter 3, *Intercultural communication principles,* introduces parents to the interaction between culture, language and communication. In this chapter, parents learn about different communication patterns across cultures and basic rules for effective intercultural communication.

Each chapter of the training material begins with the *main points* to be presented and explains the *importance* of the content to follow. Training content is delivered through *a variety of training activities,* which help the learners to get motivated, obtain knowledge and understanding, reflect more profoundly on certain issues, apply newly gained insights in everyday life and interact with their diverse environment. We strongly encourage you to do your best to do the exercises that require interaction with real people and not simply in your mind. This will help you realise the importance and utility of what you are learning. At chapter end *a review* is provided. The Parents4All training material is intended as a *self-study course* and all activities are addressed to the learner.

You will see many times the terms *host society parents* (HSP) and *migrant, refugee or ethnic-cultural minority parents* (MR/ECMP). HSP refers mainly to local parents but it can also refer to parents of migrant origin who have completely integrated into the host society due to living many years there or are second or third generation migrants. MR/ECMP refers to a broad spectrum of parents of diverse origin who are not well acquainted with the cultural norms, the language and the everyday

practices of the host societies. The terms migrant-refugee parents (MRP), ECM parents or MR/ECMP are used interchangeably within the training material, reflecting the different social contexts in the Parents4All partnership countries.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy this training and you find it useful for thriving in diversity, better supporting your children and strengthening social cohesion!

EXPLANATION OF SYMBOLS

You can distinguish between the different activities in this document looking at the icons next to them:

Theory – information

Think about it

Additional external sources of information

Related video/s

Reflection exercises

Apply what you have learned

CHAPTER 1: SELF-PERCEPTION AND PERCEPTION OF THE OTHER

What will I learn?

Key aspects of personal identity

How stereotypes work and how to recognize them in relation to social perceptions

The importance of culture in self-perception and social perception

Why is it important?

In order to get along well with others, it is important to know who we are. Who or what we are depends on our own concepts, ideas, values and beliefs, but also on our social and cultural context, the relationships we have. This self-awareness is essential to understand each other and to be able to live together in harmony.

In this topic you will gain some insight about the complex and diverse factors that shape human behaviour. This will help you to better understand not only yourself, but also the processes of integration your sons and daughters are going through. You will be in a better position to support them in a constructive way.

Personal identity and self-perception

"Who are you?" Although it seems a simple question, it is one of the trickiest you could ever be asked! What others tell you or think about you may be very different from how you would describe yourself. Although it seems strange, being aware of who you are is a difficult thing. Once you become aware of how complex it is to analyse yourself it will be easier for you to accept that other people may not be always what they seem to be at a first glance and that it takes time to really get to know them. You will also realise how many different factors affect the development of your children.

We all are who we are as a result of the combined influence of three things: a) our social context (which includes any outward influence such as culture, family, education etc.), b) our unique personal traits (mostly inherited), and c) our personal decisions/attitudes towards ourselves, life and other people. We cannot do many things to change our inherited characteristics. However, we can do a lot to understand the impact of our social context and to become more conscious or aware of how we process all what is taking place in and around us.

Before going on to read, ask yourself:

1) *What is one of your characteristics that you owe to your social context?*
2) *What is one of your characteristics that you owe to your genes?*
3) *What is one of your characteristics that you owe to your personal decisions/attitudes?*

Now think of your parents or some close friends: Can you identify some of their characteristics that are clearly a result of one of these factors?

The power of social context

Would you like to travel in time? Just imagine you could travel to any period and place of the human history – ancient Egypt, the Aztec empire, the Chinese empire of the 5th century BCE or whatever you like. Let's suppose you could understand the language of the people. Still, would you easily feel part of these societies or would you rather feel as an alien? Most probably the second. Practices and behaviours considered normal by these societies might be appalling to your and things taken for granted by you might be unthinkable or stupid for them.

This simple example illustrates that the historical epoch, the society and culture we live in influence greatly who we are: our values, patterns of thought, attitudes and behaviours. In fact, culture is all around us, shaping our brain and behaviour. Consequently, people from various cultures will process the world differently. While some cultural aspects are very obvious (such as technology or resources) other aspects influence us in a more subtle and perhaps unconscious way. This is often referred to as the cultural iceberg.

Cultural Iceberg

Formal (Overt) Aspects
The way we say we get things done

Goals
Technology
Structure
Policies and procedures
Services/Products
Financial resources

The way we really get things done

Beliefs and Assumptions, Perceptions Attitudes Feelings (anger, fear, liking, despair, etc.) about the formal and informal systems

Informal (Covert) Aspects

Values
Informal interactions
Group norms

Created by Stanley N. Herman. TRW Systems Group, 1970

For example: You see a Muslim woman wearing a head-cover (hijab). What is the tip of the cultural iceberg and what is its unseen mass?

Social context includes also family, education, the neighbourhood and socialisation practices. Stop for a moment and think what makes you different from other people just because of your family. It's a lot, isn't it?

Now reflect for a while on the culture in which you have grown up:

– *How are politics viewed? How important is the role they play in everyday life?*

– *How is religion viewed? Is there any prevalent religion? Is there real religious freedom?*

– *How does this culture view and treat the elderly people?*

– *What role is attributed to parents? What does the ideal parent look like?*

– *What is the role of women?*

– *Is there any consciousness of environmental issues? How strong?*

Now compare your answers with your own attitudes, values and behaviours in these issues. How strong is the influence?

Components of self-concept

Now let's discuss about our personal attitudes towards ourselves. We are going to speak about self-concept (or self-perception), i.e. the representation we have of ourselves or the attitudes we hold towards ourselves (McLeod, 2008). Self-concept is affected by multiple dimensions, most of which are related to the social context discussed before. Moral /spiritual, emotional and biological dimensions also play a role. It can be said that self-concept is learned rather than inherent.

The two main components of self-concept are self-image (how we see ourselves) and self-esteem (the extent to which we value ourselves).

Self-image does not necessarily relate to reality. Have a look at the following pictures of unrealistic self-image:

Now think about the following:

- *How will distorted self-image most probably affect behaviour in these cases?*

- *How can beauty ideals affect the way we see our own body?*

- *How is the self-image in these cases opposed to what other people see? How might this affect relationships with others?*

There are two other important elements which may greatly affect self-concept:

- The opinion that others form about us (e.g. how will you view your body when others make positive or negative comments about it?)

- The comparison we make with the others based either on our common points/ aspects or differences.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem or self-value refers to the emotional dimension of your self-concept. It represents how much value you place on yourself, how much you believe in yourself and your capabilities, and that you deserve happiness in your life (Branden, 1995).

In essence, we compare ourselves against an ideal standard, and depending on the image we have of ourselves, how close we are to that standard, we may feel positively or negatively about ourselves. Once again, this does not necessary relate to reality. Two people with similar circumstances and characteristics may differ a lot in how they evaluate and feel about themselves. They may be equally intelligent, have the same income and profession, look equally good etc. but one feels a zero while the other feels a success or is very content with him/herself.

People with low self-esteem tend to feel more helpless, not be content with their performance (no matter how good it is), not adapt well to stressful events and generally behave in more problematic ways. People with high self-esteem have usually the opposite experiences, but excessive self-esteem isn't that positive either, as it can lead to arrogance or violence.

Learn more about self-concept and self-esteem by doing the following exercises!

Me, myself, I — self-concept and self-esteem

Learn more about self-awareness in this video:

Self-Awareness Exercises

The identity circle

This activity helps you to identify what you consider to be the most important dimensions of your identity.

First, write your name in the central circle. Then you should fill in each satellite circle with a dimension of your identity you consider to be among the most important in defining yourself (e.g. female, athlete, Jewish, brother, educator, Asian, middle class, etc.).

Then ask yourself these questions:

- How do the dimensions of your identity that you chose as important differ from the dimensions other people use to make judgments or have opinions about you?

- When I look in the mirror each morning I see…

- Who are my people? What do they see in the mirror?

- If I had to describe myself in four words I would say that I am: (4 words)

- One experience that I have had that helped me to form this description of myself was…

- One thing about being a (answers to question above) that makes me feel good or proud is…

- Name a stereotype associated with one of the groups with which you identify that is not consistent with who you are. Fill in the following sentence:

  I am (a/an) _____ but I am NOT (a/an) _____.

My personal identity tree

Let's draw our own identity tree! For this we first draw the tree as we want, then write or draw in each of the parts the following:

• roots = your life influences and beliefs

• trunk = life structure and particularly aspects that are quite firm and fixed

• branches = relationships and connections, directions, interests, how you spend time

• leaves = information and knowledge - and sources

• buds = your ideas and hopes for the future, and your potential

• fruit = achievements

• flowers = what makes you special, strengths

• thorns = challenges, threats and difficulties

Where is culture?

Social perception

Social perception is the process we use in order to create impressions about others or/and to make judgments about individuals or groups. In simple words, social perception is about how we perceive other people and how we interpret their behaviour.

Although the concept of social perception applies more to the initial impressions made about people, it does often culminate into firm opinions formed gradually about other people. There are three main aspects that help us form impressions about other people:

- Our **own self** (familiarity with the person, attitudes, mood, self-concept)

- The **situation** surrounding the person (context of the interaction, situational circumstances)

- Observed **behaviour** of the person and other attributes (physical appearance, verbal communication, body language, assumed intentions)

The so called "first impression error" refers to the tendency to form lasting opinions about an individual based on initial impressions.

> Think of the following situation:
>
> *You meet for the first time your daughter's teacher. You were stuck in morning traffic and arrived very stressed. The teacher is 15 minutes late and mumbles an apology. You have to go to work after the meeting and your time is limited. The teacher is a tall young man and his clothing discloses a liberal lifestyle.*
>
> - *How may your mood and limited time affect your impression?*
>
> - *How may the physical appearance of the teacher affect your impression depending on your own lifestyle?*
>
> - *How does the fact that this is the first meeting with the teacher affect your expectations?*

Besides forming impressions, we also **attribute** to people certain motives or intentions, according to their behaviour. That is, we interpret their behaviour, making assumptions about their personalities. For example, we may think somebody is a kind person because he/she is smiling. Children may think a teacher is a bad person because he/she insists on discipline (PsycholoGenie.com, nd). Interestingly, it has been observed that people usually think about others that it is their personality that makes them behave the way they behave (he was rude with me because he is racist), while when it comes to themselves they usually attribute their behaviour to situational causes (I was rude because I was so tired and stressed) (eNotes, 2016).

Our social perception can also be influenced or even distorted by how well we know another person, our culture, stereotypes, prejudice etc. Learn more about stereotypes and prejudice in the next section.

Find out about a very interesting distortion of __social perception, the halo effect__.

To find out more about the impact of culture on our social perception, watch this video about __ethnocentrism and cultural relativism__.

Check out these **_activities_** for exploring your cultural awareness.

Stereotypes and prejudice

A **stereotype** is a generalised, oversimplified belief about groups of people, cultures, places and so on. It is an assumption that we make automatically when we hear about someone or something; we classify these persons or things in specific categories. These generalised classifications may be positive, negative or even neutral. Consider these examples: "Irish people have red hair and freckles", "black people are good at sports", "old people are wise", "China is dirty and polluted", "Muslims are fanatic".

Stereotypes exist all over the world and start in our mind automatically. We cannot get completely rid of them because they derive from the human need to understand the world. Making categories and classifications of people and things we can process information quicker and we avoid the time-consuming, strenuous analysis of numerous and diverse factors. It can be said that stereotypes are more or less as a "shortcut" in the cognitive process. However, due to their nature, stereotypes give an incomplete and largely erroneous picture of reality.

Prejudice refers to emotionally laden attitudes that have been formed "toward a particular social group of people before having enough information on which to form a knowledgeable opinion" (Encyclopedia.com). When prejudice is negative it produces hostility, when it is positive it produces unduly favourable feelings.

Our stereotypes and prejudices are problematic because they may lead to the development of discrimination—unjustified negative reactions toward people belonging to a certain group, simply based on their group membership. For example, when a person reacts negatively when he sees a woman parking badly, or when a person grabs his bag with force so that they do not steal it when a person of colour enters the subway. Obviously,

both beliefs are erroneous, stereotyped, and negative prejudices (Stangor, 2011).

Reflection exercises on stereotypes

Compare the two lists with gender stereotypes and answer the following questions:
   a.   Which of these stereotypes exist in your culture of origin?
   b.   Which are prevalent in the country you live in?
   c.   Which do you personally adopt?
   d.   Can you think of examples proving these stereotypes wrong?
   e.   How can these stereotypes (or their absence) influence school activities and teachers' behaviour?

Males	Females
All men enjoy working on cars	Women are nurses, not doctors
Men do not do housework and they are not responsible for taking care of children	Women are responsible for raising children
Men play video games	Women are supposed to cook and do housework
Men enjoy outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, and hiking	Women are supposed to have "clean jobs" such as secretaries, teachers, and librarians
Men are good at math	Women are supposed to look pretty and be looked at
It is always men who work in science, engineering, and other technical fields	Women do not have technical skills and are not good at "hands on" projects such as car repairs
Men are in charge; they are always at the top	Women are meant to be the damsel in distress; never the hero
As husbands, men tell their wives what to do	Women are supposed to be submissive and do as they are told

From List of Gender Stereotypes.

Read the news extracts below and highlight how stereotypes and prejudice lead to discrimination.

a. *Sky Sports presenters Andy Gray and Richard Keys have been accused of sexism after making several comments about a female referee, called Sian Massey. They commented on her understanding of the offside rule during a Premier League match. The commentators believed their microphones were switched off but were actually recorded making remarks such as: 'Somebody better get down there and explain offside to her.'*
'Can you believe that? A female linesman. Women don't know the offside rule.'

b. *James Parke, 22, was on a night out which ended in him fighting for his life. James, who is a trainee police officer, was having fun with friends (they are homosexual) when up to 20 boys, some as young as 14, started shouting homophobic abuse at them. James was repeatedly punched and kicked in his face and body by the boys and he was left with several skull and facial fractures.*

Ways to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices

Stereotypes and prejudice are not easy to change. However, if we become conscious of our own stereotypes and try to adopt a more realistic view of the people around us, this will help us greatly to have better relationships and enjoy, rather than resent, diversity around us. Consider for a moment the consequences of cultural stereotyping in our relationship with school:

- It influences our perception of others: More positive perceptions of similar groups, such as parents of the same nationality.

- It affects our behaviour: Not interacting with other parents from different religions, nationalities etc.; not cooperating with teachers; passing on to our children defensive or hostile behaviour towards peers.

- It affects the behaviour of the stereotyped groups: Feeling inferior, passing on to children who are less well prepared, feelings of resentment etc.

Here are some tips that can help to eliminate stereotypes and prejudice:

- Developing empathy: putting oneself in the other's shoes, asking oneself questions like: Why will others act that way? How will they feel being discriminated?

- Imagining the victim in a different role: e.g. the increased participation of black actors in comedy series has favoured their inclusion; television series that show female characters of great strength combat gender stereotypes etc.

- Increased communication with other parents, teachers, the education community and between groups reduces prejudice/discrimination

- Promote friendship with people from other groups, for example with parents from different cultures.

- Education based on acceptance and tolerance. From infancy, values and attitudes that exalt human dignity must be taught.

All That We Share. A thought provoking video!

First Impressions

Combatting stereotypes:

How to talk to your children

Talking to kids about racial stereotypes

Identifying stereotypes

Think about a situation when someone made a biased judgment about you or acted unfairly toward you because of your age, skin colour, clothes you were wearing, gender, the way you speak, where you live, how much money your family has, or some other reason.

Now, reflect on these questions:

- How did you feel?
- Why?
- How did you deal with it?

Review of Chapter 1

CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPING TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

What will I learn?

The meaning and importance of tolerance and understanding in culturally diverse societies

To analyse my own behaviour and improve tolerance and understanding in daily life

To work on tolerance and understanding with my children

Why is it important?

In the recent years, all the more people from different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities are living in Europe, and many different lifestyles and beliefs co-exist. Some people are afraid that by developing tolerance they will lose their own identity. But tolerance and understanding are not about becoming like the others; it is being able to live in peace and harmony with other people, even though they are different. Tolerance is needed in all spheres of life, at every level and at every stage, from the smallest to the largest unit of society.

Due to the fact that children mimic their parents, tolerance and understanding can be easily taught from an early age. When children learn to be open-minded toward various cultures, food, people, and faiths surrounding them, the easier it will be for them to accept others when they get older.

Tolerance and understanding in multicultural societies

What is tolerance? Take the test!

1. Tolerance means that you consider all different beliefs, traditions, lifestyles and customs to be good.
   True or false?

2. Tolerance means that you adopt the way of thinking of other people and thus change yourself.
   True or false?

3. If you are tolerant you compromise on your rights and your own lifestyle is in danger.
   True or false?

Tolerance is defined as the **"willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them"** (Cambridge Dictionary).

As you can see, according to the definition of tolerance, all the above statements are false. By being tolerant you do *not* consider everything to be good, you do *not* lose your identity, you do *not* compromise on your rights and lifestyle. The very essence of tolerance is **respect for the dignity and freedom of other human beings**: you acknowledge their right to have their own opinions and customs, even if they differ from your own or you dislike them. At the same time you acknowledge that you don't have the right to impose your own beliefs and lifestyle on them. Tolerance serves the need to guarantee the mutual recognition of equal dignity for all members of a community. Living in a tolerant society protects also *your* identity, so it is good for you, too. It has been said that tolerance is the only means that can "ensure the survival of mixed communities in every region of the globe" (Spinthourakis, 2007). Needless to say, tolerance, just like freedom, has its limit – the violation of human rights.

Watch this provoking <u>video on tolerance</u>! You may be surprised!

Reflection exercises on tolerance

Ask yourself:

- What kinds of diversity exist in your community?
- How tolerant is the community you live in?
- What kind of struggles between cultures and/or lifestyles exist?
- Toward which aspects is it more difficult for you to display tolerance? Different races, cultures, religions, political beliefs, sexual orientations?
- How do you benefit from the tolerance of others?

The benefits of developing intercultural understanding

Tolerance consists of the "Golden rule" for achieving a smooth and peaceful coexistence among people from different backgrounds (religion, culture, political beliefs, nationality etc.). But tolerance does not necessarily involve understanding. You may tolerate something without understanding it. But intercultural understanding enables us to **distinguish the reasons** behind different attitudes, customs, behaviours and reactions. At its very best, it enables us to **appreciate** others from different communities, **to be open and flexible** to various forms of social and cultural diversity (South Australia Department of Education, 2017; UBC, 2015).

Understanding is an active skill and needs effort to acquire. In order to understand other cultures or social groups you need **a) to know about them, and b) to interact with them**. Building on your self-awareness about your own identity, you need to explore why certain things may be so admired, desired, abhorred, despised or neglected in other cultures/ social groups. Once you understand the whys you will be able to adapt successfully to sensitive situations in which race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, disability and culture affect people's experiences and reactions. You will be able to empathise with different people but also learn from them and challenge your stereotypes.

But the question is: Why bother to develop this kind of understanding? Is tolerance not enough? Well, intercultural understanding helps you to…

- ✓ Be more tolerant and mindful

- ✓ Become more objective, less prejudiced

- ✓ Get the best from all the diversity around you

- ✓ Cultivate meaningful social relationships across culturally different groups

Before going on to read, ask yourself:

- *Think of your work and neighbourhood: are there any people belonging to different social groups or cultures that you have difficulty understanding?*

- *Does this difficulty come from your lack of information about these groups or from your own firm beliefs/preferences? Does it make any difference?*

- *Would it be possible to refuse to tolerate or accept something although we do understand the reasons behind it?*

Helping children to develop tolerance and understanding

In order to integrate effectively in a multicultural society, children need to develop intercultural competences. They need to develop the ability to tolerate, understand, effectively interact, and communicate with people from diverse cultures. As a parent you can help them by[1]:

- Understanding the influence of your own cultural values, attitudes and beliefs

- Valuing diversity in your life and showing interest in and learning about other cultures. Educate your children about diverse cultures. You may seek together relevant resources.

- Modelling an attitude of respect for diverse cultures and interacting positively with people from diverse backgrounds. Do not stereotype or make negative comments about diverse cultures. This includes comments about other children at school or in the neighbourhood.

- Being aware of the diversity in your community and helping your children understand it.

- Being aware of the diversity that is **not** around.

- Talking about the ways that different cultural groups are presented in the media

Last but not least, keep open communication lines with your children! Try to understand how they perceive diversity, how they feel about it, how it affects them, and whether the school activities help them in developing understanding or not.

A video on tolerance and equality: ***We are all people we are all equal***

Teach your kids about tolerance and diversity: ***5 free short films***

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[1] http://hybridparenting.org/6-ways-to-foster-tolerance-in-a-multicultural-society/; South Australia Department of Education, 2017

Work with your children: "BIRDS"

View this short film together and comment on it from a tolerant and positive view of diversity. Reflect beforehand on how to do this and how to convey the message properly.

Identify any real situation where you have felt the same as the bird in the short film.

For the Birds

Review of Chapter 2

CULTURE

Culturally diverse societies

Interculturalism and multiculturalism

Considers Others

Demands

TOLERANCE

UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge

Behaviour

Emotions

CHAPTER 3: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

What will I learn?

The relation between culture, language, and communication

Different communication patterns across cultures, including non-verbal communication

Basic rules of intercultural communication

Why is it important?

Having good intercultural communication skills allows us to deal across cultures, which is increasingly important nowadays, as the world is getting smaller through affordable air travel, internet, English becoming an international language, and of course, migration. Intercultural communication skills are tremendously important when communicating with people from our children's multicultural school environment, be it other parents, teachers, or school staff. The world getting smaller doesn't mean the world becoming identical, it means having more and more contact with people who are culturally different from us. Being able to deal with this cultural difference not only peacefully, but also creatively and innovatively, is becoming a very important skill that allows us to thrive in a global world, as citizens, community members, and parents. Speaking English or the country's local language and getting acquainted with different customs isn't enough, we have to understand non-verbal communication that happens across cultures. After all:

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said." – Peter Drucker

Relation between language, culture, and communication

It is commonly accepted that language is a part of culture, and that it plays a very important role in it. Some social scientists consider that without language, culture would not be possible. Language reflects culture, and at the same time is influenced and shaped by it. Brown (2008:171) describes the two as follows: "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." In a word, culture and language are inseparable.

Some authors have talked about language, culture, and communication, using the following metaphors.

From a philosophical view:

Language and culture makes a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape.

From a communicative view:

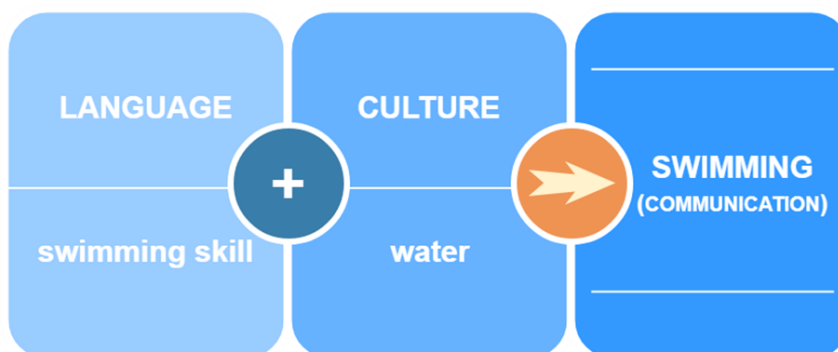Communication is swimming, language is the swimming skill, and culture is water. Without language, communication would remain to a very limited degree (in very shallow water); without culture, there would be no communication at all.

From a pragmatic view:

Communication is like transportation: language is the vehicle and culture is the traffic light. Language makes communication easier and faster; culture regulates, sometimes promotes and sometimes hinders communication.

In a word, language and culture, as different as they are, form a whole.

–   Can you think of some characteristic expressions in your language that bear a strong cultural meaning? How easy is it to translate them into another language?
–   Can you think of a word you adopted from another language because no word of your language can describe that thing or concept?

This is a video explaining how language shapes the way we think. *Does language shape how we think?*

For further study we suggest you take a look at this short article about the relation between language and culture. At the bottom of the webpage you can also find links to other useful articles. *The Relationship between Language and Culture*

Basic notions of verbal communication

Verbal communication, i.e. words that we say and hear, helps us express ourselves and understand others. We use it to ask questions that give us information. We also use verbal communication to describe things, people, and ideas. Words help us inform, persuade, and entertain others. Our personal relationships are formed through our verbal expressions. Language is expressive. Verbal expressions help us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs.

There are three important factors that we need to take into account in verbal communication:

Formulation: Is my message expressed in a *clear*, *coherent* and *complete* way? Is all important information explicitly included?

The **medium**: It is important to check for: clear and correct *pronunciation* and *articulation*; correct *grammar* and *syntax* and *fluent* expression.

The **receiver**: Is the message *complexity* and *courtesy* level appropriate for the particular receiver in the given context? Is there consideration for the receiver's *viewpoints*, *background* and *mind-set*?

Especially when communicating with people from other cultures, it is very easy to be misunderstood, because of the differences in linguistic skills, sense of humour and mind-sets. Therefore, it is especially important to avoid certain negative ways of verbal communication that can destroy interpersonal relationships:

- **Global labels.** Don't label anyone as irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy. Such judgments and generalizations can only make the situation worse.

- **Sarcasm.** "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Although sarcasm is often expressed as humour, through it people usually communicate negative feelings.

- **Dragging up the past.** People bring up negative past experiences when they don't want to discuss a current situation. It may also mean that they have been holding grudges.

- **Negative comparisons.** Comparing a person to other people can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.

- **Threats.** Threatening someone with violence usually signals the end of productive communication. It also shows a person's insecurity.

> *Review the types of unsupportive messages discussed here. Which of them do you think has the potential to separate people the most? Why?*
>
> *Which one do you have the most difficulty avoiding (directing toward others)? Why?*

For a detailed explanation of the principles of verbal communication and self-assessment exercises, read the following article:

Oral Communication: Some Basic Principles

Basic notions of non-verbal communication

Verbal messages are of course an important part of our communication, but the way we communicate non-verbally is equally, and sometimes more, important. Non-verbal communication includes the following:

- Tone of voice
- Rate and volume of speech
- How we articulate our words
- Rhythm, intonation and stress placed on words
- Facial expression
- The amount of eye contact we make
- Gestures/touch
- Body language and posturing

Aspects of non-verbal communication

More than our words, non-verbal messages can often be unintentional and spontaneous, or even beyond voluntary control (like pupil dilation). Therefore, many people tend to rely more on the non-verbal cues than on the spoken word.

- *When someone sends you a mixed message in which the verbal and non-verbal messages contradict each other, which one do you place more meaning on? Why?*

- *Our personal presentation, style of dress, and surroundings such as an apartment, car, or office send non-verbal messages about our identities. Analyse some of the non-verbal signals that your personal presentation or environment send. What do they say about who you are? Do they create the impression that you desire?*

- *Can you recognize any specific non-verbal communication features that represent your culture and you use them in your daily life?*

- *Please think of two of your children's teachers. With whom do you feel more comfortable to discuss with about the performance of your children and with whom are you absolutely not? What is it that makes you feel this way? Their body language? The way they express themselves? Something else?*

Gestures in different cultures, international etiquette: *Cultural curiosities*

Importance of eye contact in Western cultures: *Non-Verbal Communication: Eye Contact Avoidance*

In this article you can learn how to improve your non-verbal skills:

Reading Body Language and Improving Your Nonverbal Skills

The impact of non-verbal communication

Read the following study about the impact of positive non-verbal communication.

A study conducted by Hyunwoo Jung and Euichang Chai (2014) observed the non-verbal communication a physical health teacher gave to his class over an eight-month period for two hours every week. The teacher 'Lee' was observed to be a very optimistic individual who had a lot of compassion for his class. Lee's non-verbal communication such as his facial expressions, clothing choices, voice tone, touch and care were all noted over the eight months. After the eight-month period had commenced, the students were interviewed, and an observation diary had been recorded noting physical interactions within the class and changes in behavior over the eight-month period. From the results the observer had gained in documentation, it had been evident that the students had come to mimic Lee. The students displayed a sense of compassion and respect to one another, encouragement, cooperation and honesty. When the students were interviewed they generally seemed to have a very positive outlook on the subject and many believed this was because of the way Lee had taught, treated and encouraging them through his positive, optimistic and friendly nature. It became evident after the case study was completed, that Lee's non-verbal communication had aided in developing the students' values and morals. They were taught how to show respect and care for one another through observing Lee and had also developed a confidence in his ability to teach the subject matter effectively through his professional demeanor combined with his thorough knowledge.

Now think about the following:

- Did Lee give the students any verbal lesson about positive non-verbal communication?
- Think now of your own non-verbal communication habits. Do you perhaps imitate somebody unconsciously (a parent, a teacher, somebody else)?

- What impact might your non-verbal communication style have on your children? Is it what you want?
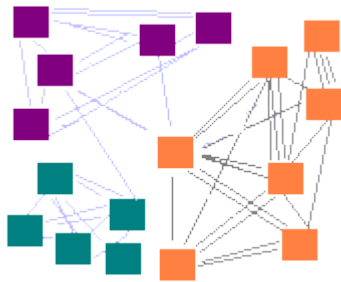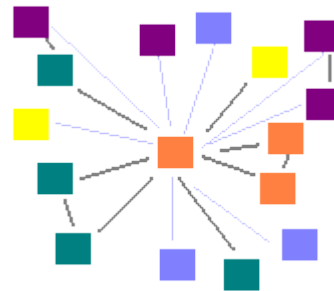
Low vs. high context cultures

What are low and high context cultures?

According to Wikipedia, **high-context culture** and **low-context culture** are terms used to describe cultures based on how clear and direct the messages communicated by people are and how much the context means in certain situations.

- Messages exchanged in a high-context culture carry indirect meanings with more information than the spoken parts

- In low-context cultures, messages have a clear meaning, with nothing hidden beyond the words used

High context communication   Low context communication

Higher-context cultures include the Afghan, African, Arabic, Brazilian, Chinese, French Canadian, Filipinos, French, Greek, Hawaiian, Hungarian, Indian, Indonesian, Italian, Irish, Japanese, Korean, Latin Americans, Nepali, Pakistani, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Southern United States, Vietnamese, South Slavic, and West Slavic.

Lower-context cultures include the Australian, Dutch, English Canadian, English, Finnish, German, Israeli, New Zealand, Scandinavian, Swiss, and United States.

Entering high and low context situations

Besides the preferred way of communicating within a culture, there are also different communicational settings that may require a different amount of contextual information. For example, high context will be common in situations like family gatherings, a conversation or party with friends, expensive gourmet restaurants, neighbourhood restaurants with a regular clientele, undergraduate on-campus friendships etc. independently of the culture one belongs to. The reason is that these groups of people have a lot in common and do not need to explicitly state everything in order to be understood. High contexts can be difficult to enter if you are an outsider because you don't carry the context information internally, and because you can't instantly create close relationships.

Low contexts are relatively easy to enter if you are an outsider because the environment contains much of the information you need to participate, and because can you form relationships fairly soon. Examples of low context settings are large airports, a chain supermarket, a cafeteria, a convenience store, sports where rules are clearly laid out etc. where clarity is of great importance and people are not expected to infer or guess the meaning of the messages.

Remember that **every culture and every situation has its high and low aspects**. For instance, a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is usually a low context situation: any parent can join, the dates of the meetings, who is president, what will be discussed, etc. are all explicitly available information, and it is usually fairly clear how to participate in the meetings. However, if this is a small town, perhaps the people who run the PTA all know each other very well and have many common interests. They may "agree" on what should be discussed or what should happen without even talking about it, as they may have unconscious, unexpressed values that influence their decisions. Other parents from outside may not understand how decisions are actually being made. So the PTA is still low context, but it has a high context subgroup that is part of a high context small town society.

Two short presentations about communication in low and high context cultures:
Understanding Cultural Communication Differences
What Is The Difference Between a High-Context and Low-Context Culture?

A collection of misunderstandings that may arise between people of Indian and Western cultures:
Intercultural Communication: Misunderstandings

Relationship vs. task-oriented cultures

Have you ever asked yourself the following questions?

- *Why is it that Americans and British hardly ever answer the question, "How are you doing?"*

- *Why is it that Indians almost never say "No" if you ask them, "Can you do this?"*

- *Why is it that Koreans and Chinese always want to hang out with their colleagues outside of work?*

The answer lies in a major distinction that shapes every culture – **task oriented vs. relationship-oriented view. There are some cultures that value getting a task done whereas in some other cultures, long term relationships with people matter more than a task they are handling right now.**

Of course, no country falls completely into one extreme or the other. It usually lies somewhere in the middle, some closer to extremes than others. The USA, Canada, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands are examples of task-oriented cultures whereas India, China, Spain, Italy, Greece are examples of relationship-oriented cultures.

Task oriented cultures view dedication to finishing a task as a way to show respect, professionalism, willingness to be a part of the team. You build relationships by proving that you get things done for the team. Any interruptions in the process are viewed as distractions and the lack of commitment, which keep you away from forming meaningful friendships.

In comparison, relationship-oriented cultures allow interruptions by other people because they do not want to be rude and hurt others by not accommodating needs of those individuals. Chatting about stuff that is totally unrelated to a task at hand is essential for forming relationships beyond work environment. Socializing is a big part of work. Even in many last minute or serious meetings in India, you will see that food is an integral part of the meeting. Many times, the task related work is done outside office hours, and planning meetings are used to form relationships.

Task-Oriented	Relationship-Oriented
Emphasis on work facilitation	Emphasis on interaction facilitation
Focus on structure, roles and tasks	Focus on relationships, well-being and motivation
Produce desired results is a priority	Foster positive relationships is a priority
Emphasis on goal-setting and a clear plan to achieve goals	Emphasis on team members and communication within
Strict use of schedules and step-by-step plans, and a punishment/incentive system	Communication facilitation, casual interactions and frequent team meetings

Intercultural Communication: Do I Focus On The Task Or The Relationship?

Choosing an appropriate relationship approach: a case study

You have recently moved to a new country because you have found a better job there. As a new member in the Parent School Organization you are going to introduce yourself to the upcoming meeting of the parents. In the new school there are also many children from abroad but none of their parents participate in the Parent Organization. You have many ideas regarding the organization of out-of-school activities and you were also actively involved in school matters in the previous school of your children. Please reflect on the following questions:

- Is the country you moved to task or relationship oriented? Does this differ from the culture you belong to?

- What will be your strategy in order to become accepted by the other parents and school staff? How will the specific context of the society affect your strategy?

- How will you present yourself to the other parents?

- How do you intend to present your ideas and know-how on out-of-school activities to the other parents?

Cultural differences in non-verbal communication

Forms of non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication can take many forms. To communicate effectively with people from other cultures it is very important to not only understand what is said but also what is expressed by their body language. Below are samples of seven forms of non-verbal communication, as well as specific cultural examples.

Eye contact

Eye contact carries strong meaning in all cultures – it is important whether eye contact is made, who makes it, and how long it lasts. In many Asian cultures, avoiding eye contact is seen as a sign of respect. However, those in Latin and North America consider eye contact important for showing equality among people. In Ghana, if a young child looks an adult in the eye, it is considered an act of disobedience.

Touch

Many cultural expressions are achieved through touch. In America, for example, using a firm handshake is considered appropriate to greet a stranger or another business professional. In France, however, it is common to kiss someone you greet on both cheeks. Touching children on the head is fine in North America. Yet in Asia, this is considered highly inappropriate, as the head is considered a sacred part of the body. In the Middle East, the left hand is customarily used to handle bodily hygiene. Therefore, using that hand to accept a gift or shake hands is considered extremely rude. There are also a wide range of cultural viewpoints on the appropriate rules regarding physical contact between both similar and opposite genders.

Gestures

Gestures can convey wildly different meanings. Individuals in the United States use the "OK" sign to convey that something is acceptable. In Japan, the same hand symbol means "money." Argentinians, Belgians, the French and the Portuguese all use the symbol to mean "zero" or "nothing." Still other countries in Eastern Europe consider that same sign an offensive swear.

POTENTIALLY EMBARRASSING GESTURAL MIXUPS

U.S. Gesture	Other Interpretations
Waving good-bye	Come here (Japan)
Good luck sign	Boyfriend (Japan)
Screw you sign	I don't believe you (Uruguay)
OK sign	Money (Japan) Sex (Mexico) Homosexual (Ethiopia)
Slash across the throat	Lost job (Japan)

Source: From D. Archer, (1997), "Unspoken Diversity: Cultural Differences in Gestures, *Qualitative Sociology, 20:* 81.

Physical space

Countries that are densely populated generally have much less need for personal space than those that are not. The Japanese, for example, are less likely to react strongly to an accidental touch by a stranger than Americans. Less personal space is also needed in areas such as Latin America, and, in the context of one-on-one conversations, the Middle East.

Facial expressions

Winking is a facial expression particularly varied in meaning. In Latin America, for example, the gesture is often considered a romantic or sexual invitation. The Yoruba people in Nigeria wink at their children if they want them to leave the room. And the Chinese consider the gesture rude.

Posture

Posture can convey power structures, attitudes and levels of civility. Slouching in Taiwan is considered disrespectful, while other parts of the world may not think much of it one way or another. In America, standing

with hands on the hips may suggest power or pride, but in Argentina, it may suggest anger or a challenge.

Many cultures also frown upon showing the bottom of the shoe, something that is considered dirty. Therefore, sitting with the foot resting on the opposite knee is strongly discouraged in places such as many Arab countries.

Watch this animated video explaining non-verbal communication with examples: *Non-verbal communication*

An interesting article that includes culture-specific non-verbal communication examples: *Non-verbal communication*

An article on how easy misunderstandings can occur because of cultural differences in non-verbal communication: *Non-verbal Communication across Cultures: How to Offend and Confuse People Around the World Without Saying a Word*

Recognize cultural differences in non-verbal communication

Activity 1

Read the following real-life story about gift-giving. What would be considered an inappropriate gift in your culture? Have you ever made any mistakes in selecting a gift for someone from a different culture?

Giving gifts seems to be a universal way to please someone, if the gift is appropriate. One colleague of mine, Nishehs, once tried to impress our boss, Joe. Nishehs brought a well-wrapped gift to Joe when they first met with each other in person. Joe was indeed pleased as he received the gift from Nishehs, but his smile faded away quickly right after he opened the gift. Joe questioned Nishehs angrily, "Why is it green?" Shocked and speechless, Nishehs murmured, "What's wrong with a green hat?"

The miscommunication resulted from the cultural differences between them. Nishehs is an Indian, whereas Joe is Chinese. For the Chinese, a green hat means one's wife is having an extramarital affair. (Martin, Nakayama, 2010, p. 279)

Activity 2

In line with the abovementioned real-life scenarios try to think of other incidents of cultural misunderstandings or differences that you have experienced while communicating with parents from another culture, for example in situations like the following:

- exchange of food and recipes
- sports
- tone of voice and expressiveness
- work
- exchange of know-how/ providing guidelines
- argumentation

Principles of intercultural communication

The writer Anais Nin said, **"we don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."** We don't often realize the filter through which we see the world. Sometimes instead of noticing the behaviour and stopping to think what it could mean, we jump to the conclusion about its meaning and feel offended. Communication with people from other cultures is far more rewarding when we are able to understand each other, prevent conflicts and convey trust and good-will. Though there is no single recipe for effective intercultural communication, below you will find some basic principles.

Focus on understanding

- o   Ask open-ended questions
- o   Be non-judgmental
- o   Do not express disagreement immediately
- o   Be aware that what is initially presented may not actually be the case
- o   Listen to others and give them time to tell their story in their own way and own words
- o   Others may need to develop a sense of trust before they are willing to share their vulnerabilities

Acknowledge and respect cultural differences rather than minimize them

- o   Inquire about and acknowledge any cultural/ethnic/racial differences
- o   If appropriate ask if there is anything about the cultural/ethnic/racial background of your interlocutors which they feel you need to know
- o   Ask if there is anything in general they would like to know about your culture to better understand your viewpoint

Focus on similarities
- o   Work
- o   Family life
- o   Leisure activities

Treat all people with dignity and respect
- o   Keep an open mind
- o   Keep it simple
- o   Speak in a polite manner
- o   Avoid making judgments and assumptions

Which of the principles of effective intercultural communication do you think you are already applying, and which ones need the most work?

Identify how you became so competent at the first one and some ways that you can improve the second one.

[Learn about cultural differences in 6 minutes](#)

[How Culture Drives Behaviours](#)

An interesting blog article that gives useful tips for effective intercultural communication: [Intercultural Communication Tips](#)

An interesting approach to motivating people to understand that other cultures approach problems differently: [Who do you save?](#)

An interesting study concerning the [Role of Cultural Background in a Parent-Teacher Relationship](#)

Reflection on effective intercultural communication

What is the appropriate behaviour in your culture when facing the following situations?

1. Answering a phone during a meeting (business, social, formal, informal)

2. Speaking to people differently, based on their gender, age, job title, etc.

3. Voicing opinions during a work meeting or parent meeting

Do you know of other cultures that have different behavioural norms?

Try this: In the next parent meeting ask 2 or 3 parents from other cultures about the norms of their cultures in the situations just described.

Review of Chapter 3

In this chapter "Intercultural communication principles", you have learned about the close relationship between language, culture, and communication. Communication largely depends on the person's native culture, and culture, as we have learned, varies greatly in many different aspects. There are low context vs. high context cultures, as well as relationship-oriented vs. task-oriented cultures. Based on these differences, there are even more culture-specific communication styles. By applying basic intercultural communication principles we can enjoy good relationships with people from other cultures and prevent conflicts.

References and photo credits

For a full citation of references and photo credits please see the full version of this unit on http://parents4all.eu.

Link to Unit 2

Continue to Unit 2, ***The Role of Parents in Social Inclusion and Cohesion.*** There you will find:

Chapter 1: ECM integration: Meaning and benefits for the society

Chapter 2: Benefits of children experiencing diversity

Chapter 3: Impact of prejudice and racism on children

Chapter 4: Understanding challenges ECM parents face

Chapter 5: Learning about other educational systems

Chapter 6: Support of school activities for the development of interculturalism