

Transcript for “Culture and Intercultural Communication” – Alexandra Schreiber

Hello and welcome. My name is Alexandra Schreiber and I'm from the Intercultural Learning Lab at Göttingen University. I'm also a member of the Rocket Erasmus Consortium. And in this video, I'm going to talk about Culture and Intercultural Communication. So culture can broadly be defined as the expectations and ways of living of a group of people with the acknowledgment that those people can belong to numerous other groups.

Here are some examples. It includes the expectations of queer how to be treated as a student while studying abroad. This is rather to be an autonomous experience. Or is it expected to be accompanied through the learning experience and the ways of living? That includes how one communicates within a group of students in a project. Is this rather task oriented or relationship oriented, meaning that it's important to establish personal connections first?

Something seen from the perspective of one's own culture can have an entirely different meaning when looked at in the context of a foreign culture. So understanding oneself and understanding others are closely related processes. To do one, you must start with the other and vice versa. An emergent concept of culture as being as an iceberg includes aspects that are above or below the waterline.

So above and emergent waterline are visible physical cultural characteristics like dress foods and festivals. And below this imagined borderline are aspects of culture that are invisible and to others without deeper exploration. And these include orientations to time, expectations of communication style of or values and relationships. So-called subcultures or small cultures can be found in social groupings with a cohesive pattern of behavior.

People can belong to multiple and overlapping subcultures or small cultures. Examples are academic disciplines, student groups, pop culture, fandom, or others. Cultural hybridity is understanding that cultural identity is fluid. It provides a framework for understand the complex and shifting cultural identities that emerge as individuals move between cultural contexts, making choices about how they self shape their cultural selves.

Now, significant intra-cultural variations take away this meaning of culture as being assumedly homogeneous populations, and it leads to a more specific concept of a patterned practice. More or less stable patterns of everyday life are specific to particular types of situations, contexts. Defining preferences, predispositions and expectations for actors, for example, how to solve problems and address challenges.

Regular patterned activities shape the human mind and body through embodiment and internalization and acting practices, shape and reshape norms, processes, institutions and forms of sociality. So this is an example of how culture is a shifting and dynamic concept. Let's take a look at intercultural communication. A scholar in the field, Daria Deardorf of says that intercultural communication prioritizes communicating within human diversity that is inclusive of age, race, genders, religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, physical abilities and ideological beliefs.

The way how people view the world is culturally learned and shaped through patterns of behavior in everyday life and through institutions. Culture, in one's own cultural lens influences this interpretation and meaning that is attached to practices of behavior. For example, one's learning environment is affecting the way a person perceives behavior and etiquette in the classroom. The mentioned invisible aspects of culture like values and beliefs required time and energy to explore, to adapt to, and to be integrated into existing patterns of cultural behavior.

Now let's take a closer look at intercultural communication and what happens when stereotypes come into play. Social psychology explains stereotypes with a tendency of people to group themselves and others into groups which they belong to (in-groups) and those which they don't belong to (outgroups). Stereotypes can distort people's perception and interpretations of the behavior of other group members and this includes the way how conflictual situations are perceived, interpreted and evaluated. Aspects such as cognitive dissonance may hinder nonviolent communication and conflict transformation, which aim to improve good relationships among the parties involved.

Intercultural communication and intercultural learning includes gaining a greater insight and a nonjudgmental approach when encountering situations that are new and that do not reflect own expectations and are unfamiliar. It covers cultural self-awareness, appreciation of cognitive complexity and difference, with the importance of taking perspective and building empathy. Building intercultural competence includes this non-judgmental approach also to conflict, acknowledging and expecting a range of different interpretations and evaluations within a culturally diverse group of people.

Attribution is the process by which people explain other's behavior and making personal or situational attributions for this behavior. The culture in which people live shapes the kind of attributions that are being made about the people and the social situations. For example, a cultural belief that persons are autonomous and responsible for their own actions can create a much different attribution than when a cultural group has the approach that emphasizing relationship between individuals and the social surroundings is important.

Let's take a closer look at stereotypes, because those are beliefs that associate groups of people with certain characteristics. The formation of stereotypes begin with this tendency for people to group themselves and others into social categories, allowing procedures to make quick inferences about group members, which can lead to inaccurate judgments.

Stereotypes of groups distort people's perception and interpretation of the behaviors of group members.

Procedures are likely to see members of stereotyped groups as more similar to the stereotype they actually are, especially when a stereotyped person behaves in an ambiguous way and perceive as reduced ambiguity by interpreting the behavior as consistent with a stereotype. So the perception of others is profoundly influenced by the act of perceiving them as members of a group perceive as thoughts, feelings and actions can be influenced by aspects of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical appearance and economic class, among others.

The formation of stereotypes involves a) categorization in which people are sorted into groups and b) the perception of groups to which people belong in groups and to which they don't belong: outgroups. Social categorization is a process in which people sort each others into groups based on attributes like race, gender, among many others. This leads to overestimated differences between groups and to underestimated difference within groups.

Ingroup and outgroup creates the separation of an "us" versus "them" - both in quotation marks - leading to an outgroup homogeneity effect. And here perceivers assume that there is a greater similarity among members of outgroups than are among members of one's own group (ingroup) with a fine differences between members of "us", but a sense of "them" - both in quotation marks - being all alike.

So I'm going to round up this video with a look at building intercultural competence. With all what we know and the influences that are there, building intercultural competence can be done with a great activity. It's called D.A.E. It's an acronym for Describe, Analyze and Evaluate. Here the broader purpose is to guide people toward a greater insight when encountering unfamiliar situations, including mindfully withholding judgment.

So this is important. It includes fostering self awareness of personal and cultural assumptions, strengthening the importance of frame shifting when encountering the unfamiliar and moving through a process of sense making, interpreting, realizing that description, interpretation and evaluation are often not distinguished. People react and speak from cultural and personal perspectives as if they were describing some objective

truth. And this activity gives a great insight into the layered facets of intercultural communication.

These are some references for this talk. And thank you very much for listening and for watching!