Intercultural Capability Glossary

Culture

A set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional attributes of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society or social group. Attributes of culture range from more easily observed such as group membership, cultural celebrations, customs, traditions, language and everyday ways of doing things, to the less readily observed such as values, attitudes, obligations, roles, religious beliefs and ways of thinking. Each culture is a sum of assumptions and practices shared by members of a group distinguishing them from other groups. Note: this definition is drawn from UNESCO [<unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international -migration/glossary/cultural-diversity/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/cultural-diversity/)> Date sourced: 20/11/2019.

Cultural diversity

The existence of a wide variety of cultures and recognising the differences between various cultures. This can be in the context of communities, regions, nations or globally.

Cultural identity

The aspects of identity shared by members of a culture that, taken as a set, mark them as distinct from members of other cultures. Like most forms of identity, cultural identity is socially constructed. People create and claim aspects of their culture, whether that be speaking a particular language, eating particular foods, or following particular religious practices. Individuals have multiple identities and these change over time by being constructed and reconstructed through interactions within and between cultures. A mixed cultural identity at the individual level can be thought of as cultural hybridity.

Cultural practices

Cultural practices refers to the expression and practice of cultural traditions. Examples of Cultural Practices include the practicing of religion beliefs and celebrations, following formal customs as well as various everyday ways of doing things.

Cultural traditions

Cultural tradition refers to how the attributes of culture are handed down from one generation to the next. Cultural traditions develop and evolve over time through the participation and contribution of members of cultural groups as they engage with each other and with wider society. Traditions are handed down in different ways drawing on, for example:

* particular cultural values or religious beliefs
* myths, legends and other stories
* characteristics of places (for example the design of a cultural building), times (for example dates given historical significance), artefacts and symbols
* ceremonies and other rituals
* social structures

Empathy

The ability to identify and understand the thoughts and feelings of someone else in a context where they are feeling sad or experiencing a major struggle. It is not used to identify with people who are feeling happy or experiencing joy. Empathy is often described as ‘standing in someone else’s shoes’ or ‘seeing through someone else’s eyes’.

Intercultural

Describes what occurs when members of two or more different cultural groups interact or influence one another in some fashion.

Reflexivity

The ability to step outside one’s own experiences in order to reflect consciously on them, considering what is happening, what it means and how to respond. The ability to be reflexive is an essential skill for critical perspectives in intercultural understanding.

Representations of culture

How perspectives on the attributes of culture, cultural groups or cultural practices are expressed in written, verbal or visual text, or symbolic forms for example news articles, speeches/blogs, narratives, visual/performed arts works, logos, or reports.