

SECTION 2: MY OWN CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

In order to understand different ways of behaviour and communication styles, it is necessary to become aware of what one assumes is "normal". In most training programmes on intercultural communicative competence, it is therefore common practice to deal with values, basic assumptions and conventions in the participants' own culture(s) before trying to understand - and accept - foreign cultures.

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19	A QUESTIONNAIRE	To increase understanding that what one takes for granted may be seen quite differently even by members of the same culture and most probably by members of other cultures	Asking someone's opinion, expressing an opinion, agreeing, hesitating to agree	1 & 2
21	WHAT'S NORMAL FOR YOU? PUNCTUALITY	To discuss the trainees' own cultural standards and to question the validity of stereotypes using the concept of punctuality as an example. To practise the use of polite discourse in discussion	Asking for opinions, expressing an opinion, agreeing, hesitating, refusing to give an opinion	1 & 2
23	ARE YOU A TOLERANT PERSON?	Personal values, basic assumptions and conventions and how these relate to cultural standards	Describing something, expressing an opinion, agreeing, disagreeing	1 & 2
25	HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?	To discuss to which extent personal characteristics may be typical of, similar to or different from those found in other members of one's own culture	Expressing feelings, likes, dislikes	1 & 2
27	WHAT FOREIGN VISITORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR HOME	Everyday life, behaviour etc. Ideas about "normality" and awareness of what this means	Suggesting, complementing, reasoning	1 & 2
29	THE ART OF BEING GERMAN	To raise awareness and discuss an outsider's view of Germany and realise that Germans are seen this way by others	Agreeing, disagreeing, reaching agreement	2
31	STEREOTYPES	To examine the stereotypes others have of one's own culture and the extent to which this type of stereotype may be useful	Agreeing, disagreeing, expressing an opinion	1 & 2
33	EVERYONE NEEDS STEREOTYPES	Truth, usefulness and limitations of stereotypes	Agreeing, disagreeing, expressing an opinion	2

SECTION 2: MY OWN CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

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A QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Answer the following questions. Take notes on your answers.

1. How do / did you address your parents?
2. What is the main meal in your family and when do you have it?
3. Which is the most important holiday for you?
4. Is alcohol served in your home?
5. At what time and where do you receive visitors?
6. Are you always punctual ?



Now discuss your answers in groups of three.

Asking someone's opinion	<p>Do you think that's normal? Do you agree with that? Do you like it ? Would you like to ... ?</p>
Expressing an opinion	<p>I feel ... / I think that ... / I believe that ... If you ask me ...</p>
Agreeing	<p>You're absolutely right. I absolutely agree with you. Absolutely.</p>
Hesitating / refusing to give an opinion	<p>I'm not really sure, but ...</p>

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A QUESTIONNAIRE

TRAINER'S NOTES

A QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Answer the following questions. Take notes on your answers.

1. How do you / did you address your parents? _____
2. Which is the main meal in your family and when do you have it? _____
3. Which is the most important holiday for you? _____
4. Is alcohol served in your home? _____
5. At what time and where do you receive visitors? _____
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Agreeing	You're absolutely right. I absolutely agree with you. Absolutely.
Hesitating / refusing to state an opinion	I'm not really sure, but ...

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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH

2

AIM

To increase understanding that what one takes for granted may be seen quite differently even by members of the same culture and most probably by members of other cultures.

LEAD-IN

Ask learners to write down three things they do every day or have done today which they consider "normal".

WORKSHEET

Learners think about their own answers to the questions, make notes and then discuss these with their partner. They should also think about whether they consider their answers to be "normal" or representative of their culture. The questions are taken randomly from different areas of everyday life and are relevant to all age groups. During the discussion, the trainer should make sure that the phrases given are used by the learners.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Ask learners to conduct a class survey and make statistics about the group. How far do these represent the culture concerned?
- Ask learners to make up their own questionnaire in pairs. Each group can be given a different area to ask about, such as food, names, holidays, times etc.

BACKGROUND

In many cultures it is completely unthinkable that parents may be addressed by their first names, as is sometimes the case in Western Europe. The way parents are addressed may also change with age.

Main meals are sometimes eaten in the evening and sometimes at midday. This is something which changes with such developments as women working and all-day schools.

Holidays can be important for different reasons, such as getting presents, meeting family or religious or national reasons.

Although it may seem quite normal to Germans to serve alcohol in the home, in many cultures this is either a taboo for religious reasons or it is not done, and alcohol is only served and drunk outside the home.

Visitors are not received in homes in some cultures, but only in restaurants.

The final question leads onto the next worksheet which is about punctuality.

WHAT'S NORMAL FOR YOU?

Punctuality

Discuss the following questions with your partner (s):

What does **punctuality** mean? Does it mean the same to everyone?

- Are you always on time?
- How long do you wait if someone is late for a meeting or appointment?
- If you get an invitation to a party which says it starts at 8, when do you go?
- When do you say "Come for coffee" / "Come at lunch-time" / "Good evening"?
- Do you always wear a watch?
- What do the following words mean to you: now / in a minute / later ?

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Discuss this with your partner (s).

Use as many of the following phrases as possible.

Expressing an opinion

I feel .. / I think ... / I believe ...

Agreeing

You are absolutely right.
I absolutely agree.
That's correct.

Disagreeing, expressing a different opinion

I see your point, but ...
Sorry, I'm not sure I agree with you.
Maybe you're right, but ...
Could it also be that ... ?

Balancing reasons, hesitating

Perhaps we should also consider ...

Agreeing

Do we (all) agree that ... ?
So we (all) agree that ...



AIM

- To discuss the trainees' own cultural standards and to question the validity of stereotypes, using the concept of punctuality as an example.
- To practise the use of polite discourse in discussion.

LEAD-IN

Brainstorm ideas on time. Write the word TIME on the board. It is highly likely that the word *punctuality* or a related concept like the word *late* will be mentioned. Briefly discuss the meaning of this concept and the trainees' ideas (Is it good to be punctual? Can punctuality be negative?) so that different ideas on the subject can be brought up in the group.

WORKSHEET

Ask trainees to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Then ask one member of each group to briefly report on the discussion. The discussion should lead to an increased awareness among participants of

- the fluid nature of the notion of punctuality;
 - the importance of context and culture as far as punctuality is concerned;
 - the usefulness of stereotypes;
 - the importance of meta-communication in dealing with misunderstandings.
- It is not necessary at this stage to go into details as these will be dealt with later.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Ask learners to make up their own questionnaire on another aspect of culture (use the Worksheet on the culture iceberg for ideas).

BACKGROUND

Many Germans consider punctuality and their own ideas of what it means as normal and valid for everyone. It is often not taken into account that in professional life notions of punctuality are closely connected with hierarchy (e.g. you have to be on time for a meeting with your boss, but (s)he does not have to be quite so exact about this). There is little difference, as far as this is concerned, between Germany and many other countries and cultures. However, different cultures often have quite different notions of punctuality when it comes to meetings with friends or informal out-of-work invitations, appointments and meetings. The cultural conventions in these cases are often connected with the social groups involved as well as with more general cultural conventions.

For this reason, it is important to consider the *dos and don'ts* in particular cultures and contexts. Here it may be important to point out that even in Germany being up to 15 minutes late for a private appointment is entirely acceptable. The importance of clarification using meta-communication (see worksheets on this subject) can also be mentioned here.

The notion of time is one of the cultural dimensions examined by Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and other intercultural theorists. Some cultures are designated *monochronic* and other *polychronic*. Members of *monochronic* cultures see time as a sequence or series of events. They like detailed plans and regulated systems, they concentrate on one task at a time and they value punctuality and reliability very highly. Members of *polychronic* cultures deal with several tasks at a time and relate more closely to the person connected with the task than the task itself. They consider quality more important than keeping strictly to a deadline.

Although this distinction can be helpful, it can also lead to over-generalisation. Misunderstandings about punctuality are not always due to cultural differences. Firstly, individual members of cultures may operate using different conventions from those considered "normal" in their culture. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, different discourse conventions may lead to different ideas of how binding a given time is considered to be. Discourse conventions such as when (at what stage in the discourse) the time for a meeting or appointment is mentioned, how often this time is repeated and with what exactitude as well as how much the arrangements are emphasised all contribute to the final understanding of how binding the arranged time is considered to be. An example can be found in the different ways the French and the Germans make arrangements for private meetings. This often leads to the Germans considering the French unpunctual, because (in general!) if Germans mention an exact time once it becomes binding, while the French tend to express the binding nature of an appointment by repeating the arrangements before parting. Only this really makes it binding.

ARE YOU A TOLERANT PERSON?

How do you feel about people who

- have pierced lips?
- have rings in their ears?
- eat animals you think of as pets?
- have more than six children?
- don't send their children to school?
- interrupt you all the time when you are talking?



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Discuss the above questions with your partner (s).
 Try to find answers you all agree with.
 Use as many of the following phrases as possible.

Expressing an opinion	I feel .. / I think ... / I believe ...
Agreeing	You are absolutely right. I absolutely agree. That's correct.
Disagreeing, expressing a different opinion	I see your point, but ... Sorry, I'm not sure I agree with you. Maybe you're right, but ... Could it also be that ... ?
Balancing reasons, hesitating	Perhaps we should also consider ...
Reaching a consensus	Do we (all) agree that ... ? So we (all) agree that ...

ARE YOU A TOLERANT PERSON?

TRAINER'S NOTES

ARE YOU A TOLERANT PERSON?

How do you feel about people who

- have pierced lips?
- have rings in their ears?
- eat animals you think of as pets?
- have more than six children?
- don't send their children to school?
- interrupt you all the time when you are talking?

Discuss this with your partner (s). Try to find an answer you all agree with.
Use as many of the following phrases as possible.

Expressing an opinion	I feel ... / I think ... / I believe ...
Agreeing	You are absolutely right. I absolutely agree. That's correct.
Disagreeing, expressing a different opinion	I see your point, but ... Sorry, I'm not sure I agree with you. Maybe you're right, but ... Could it also be that ... ?
Balancing reasons, hesitating	Perhaps we should also consider ...
Reaching a consensus	Do we (all) agree that ... ? So we (all) agree that ...

ICE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH 7

AIM

To examine personal values and assumptions and how these relate to cultural standards. Many personal attitudes are not necessarily related to cultural standards and conventions, but are expressions of individual feelings and are based on personal experience. The main focus of this discussion is on how much our attitudes are affected by the culture we live in and to which extent they are individual. As with the other worksheets, it is important that learners use polite discourse conventions when discussing the questions.

LEAD-IN

Ask trainees to think of adjectives which can be used to describe the following: personal appearance, food, animals, family life, school. This can be done in small groups or in the whole group and some of the words can be written on the board and used in the discussion. Discuss which of these can be considered objective and which a matter of opinion or taste.

WORKSHEET

Ask trainees to consider their own personal attitude for each question. Say that it is important that they have an opinion on

the matter and they should think about how to express this politely. The adjectives collected may help. Point out the phrases for use in the discussion. Ask trainees to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Then ask one member of each group to briefly report on the discussion. The discussion should lead to an increased awareness among participants of

- the differences between cultures on particular attitudes which they may take for granted;
- the importance of context and culture in forming attitudes;
- how to deal with different opinions appropriately;
- the importance of finding out how issues which may be taken for granted are seen in other cultures;
- how this can be done without causing offence.

However it is not necessary at this stage to go into details as these will be dealt with later.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Ask learners to think of good reasons for doing all the things listed before giving them background information. Ask learners to think of anything else they consider unacceptable. In groups try to agree on three or more. Ask them to think of good reasons for doing these things.

BACKGROUND

Pierced ears are considered normal in many European cultures. However, in Great Britain some schools do not allow any jewellery to be worn at school. As this includes earrings, children may not have their ears pierced until they leave school. Attitudes to pierced ears in Great Britain are therefore slightly different to those in many European countries. However, as this has led to controversy with some cultures (e.g. Indian and Pakistani) where the ears of baby girls are pierced at a very early stage, schools may make an exception and allow stud earrings to be worn at school.

Ideas on pets may also differ greatly from culture to culture. There are many cultures where keeping pets is extremely unusual or unknown, so this distinction between types of animals is not made. Even within Germany, attitudes to eating such animals as horse or rabbit are very different. In India, most people are vegetarian, whereas in China vegetarianism is far less common. There are also very different taboos about which parts of an animal may be eaten. These can also differ from generation to generation.

The number of children in a family is regarded quite differently in different cultures. Many cultures regard it as desirable to have a large number of children, whereas in Northern Europe it is often considered unusual and not always positive.

It may be interesting for learners to hear that in the UK parents are not obliged to send their children to school as long as they provide an equivalent education for them. Full-time education is compulsory for all children between 5 and 16, but parents may choose to educate their children in another suitable way.

Marmite is a spread made from yeast extract which is very popular in Great Britain, although many Europeans and others consider it an acquired taste. Even in Britain it is advertised using the slogan "Love it or hate it?"