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Intercultural Communication Principles and Inclusive Communication

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3.0 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural Communication can be seen as a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual communicative process in which people from different cultural backgrounds create shared meaning (Piller, 2017: *Intercultural Communication: A critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press). Training prospective LMs in Intercultural Communication is crucial. Engendering awareness of cultural norms as well as enhancing self-awareness and communication skills are the building blocks necessary to break through cultural barriers, foster personal growth through increased understanding and acceptance, reduce conflict and increase integration, socialisation and cooperation. The ending turnout is the realisation of healthier, more inclusive and culturally richer communities.

Becoming 'interculturally effective' ensures the minimisation of jeopardising the relationship LMs build with their mentees, be they Ms or migrants, when they interact within an international learning context. Communicative relationships respectful of the mentee are imperative for the construction of relationality and accessibility, internalisation of deep learning and transference of knowledge, skills and attitudes, engagement in the process of acculturation and adaptation, and making network gains.

3.1 Generating Reflective Discourse on Interpersonal Communication in an Intercultural Encounter

Effective interpersonal communication is essential to building a trusting and strong mentoring relationship. Ms may still be learning how to communicate successfully with their mentees and therefore may turn to their LMs to show them how to communicate efficiently and effectively in this unique relationship. Hence, it becomes essential to point out to LMs the often taken for granted misconceptions about communication, in particular interpersonal communication in an intercultural encounter (Dossou et al., 2016: 'Our RADAR Communication Concept'. In: Dossou, Koffi M., and Klein, Gabriella B., *RADAR Guidelines. Understanding hate-oriented communication and tools for anti-hate communication strategies in an intercultural dimension*. Deruta/Perugia: Key & Key Communications. 2016: 5-18. <https://www.keyandkey.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/RADAR-Guidelines-EN.pdf>). Great attention must be paid not to make easy generalising statements giving intercultural communication advice (Piller, 2017). Such advice (and the literature is full of such publications) is based on a static concept of 'culture': Italian culture, African culture, Chinese culture, etc. These are abstract categories and do not help us communicate with the cultural 'other', simply because there is nothing like a geographically contextualised culture since "culture is not something that exists outside of and precedes intercultural communication" (Piller 2017, p.10).

Communication is at the same time powerful and labile. It is a powerful tool, because without communication none of the living systems on Earth could exist since life itself can be expressed as an emergent process of constant interactions between the different organisms (Günther & Folke, 1993). It is labile, because at each moment there is the risk of not understanding one another. Many factors lead to misunderstandings, miscommunication and disagreements: not sharing the same verbal system of communication, which often is the root of mutual misunderstanding, or not sharing the same understanding, a common ground of content and information, which can lead to a more complex miscommunication. While the interlocutors are aware of an

instance of misunderstanding, interlocutors are not aware of instances of miscommunication, the latter leading easily to frustration or even conflict situations.

In communication, there are regularities not pre-fixed rules. Therefore, it becomes difficult to say how to behave communicatively with a cultural 'other'. When someone from a given cultural background with given communicative habits comes into contact with someone from a different cultural background and different communicative habits, communication practices are likely to change, as the human beings tend to adapt to each other's way of behaving. Within an ambience devoid of pre-fixed rules it makes more sense to aid LMs embark on a reflective journey about the complexities of communication, interpersonal communication, interpersonal communication in an intercultural encounter, and the ethics involved in fostering and maintaining an intercultural communicative relationship.

3.1.1 Method of Application and Utilised Resources

Utilised during initial sessions of DREAMM Lead-Mentor Training, the PowerPoint presentation *Interpersonal Communication in an Intercultural Encounter* accessible on the DREAMM website <https://www.dreamm-project.eu/tools> helps debunk some of the taken for granted statements about communication and acts as a springboard for the much needed awareness and debate on the four important pillars that constitute communication in an intercultural setting:

- Reasons why communication is a complex phenomenon
- Basic precepts of interpersonal communication
- Basic precepts of interpersonal communication in an intercultural encounter
- Basic principles to overcome communicative complexity and avoid/prevent communication barriers

Prior to the presentation of each of these four sections, it is recommended that trainers and training organisations engage LMs in brainstorming sessions to gauge their prior knowledge, skills and attitudes about each topic and structure explanations around gathered feedback. Videotaped interactions between international interlocutors in open social spaces are a more tangible, realistic and relevant learning resource to aid LMs in observing and evaluating the effectiveness of the communicative approach applied with mentees during the various mentoring tasks; hence a valued addition to the presentation to consolidate the knowledge being shared with LMs.

The following lists highlight the main key notes for each of the above-mentioned sections:

Section 1: Why and when is communication complex?

This reflection is based on some basic statements and principles a complex and dynamic intercultural communication concept is built upon.

- Communication and 'culture' are not static concepts/phenomena; they are both dynamic and transformative.

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- Communication is embedded in a socio-cultural context.
- Communication occurs in a situation.
- There is a complex and dynamic interaction between socio-cultural and situational context and communication.
- The context is negotiated and performed within an interaction between communicators.
- Culture is made relevant and negotiated within an interaction; it is performed in an interaction; it is not a static label.
- Any kind of communication always leaves an effect. Words matter, but so do the other means of communication which include our body language, our voice, and visual elements on and around us.
- Clarity of intention is often marred by communication barriers. “What you say is not what the other hears”, i.e. our communicational intention almost never corresponds to what the other perceives; therefore the implication processes made by an interlocutor almost never correspond to the interpretation processes of the other interlocutor.
- In communication there are basic principles and regularities, but not rigid rules; therefore, skills such as active listening and observing are extremely important. Most people are not good at all at doing active listening.

Section 2: Basic precepts of interpersonal communication

- There are different levels of communication; not only words convey meaningful messages, but also other means (voice, body, colours, shapes, symbols):
 - words (linguistic heritage/competence) > verbal messages
 - voice (use of pauses, intonation, pitch, volume, speed...) > paraverbal messages
 - body (eye contact, direction of gaze, twitching of lips, mouth and brows, position of arms, hands, hips, feet and leg; body movement, posture, distance between the individuals in a space and their distribution within a space) > non-verbal messages
 - visual elements (colours, shapes, symbols on the bodies and around in the space) > visual messages
- Planes of communication: we are communicating on at least two planes, which are content, and relationships. During the latter, each time we are communicating with someone we do not transfer only content, but we also create, maintain, and reinforce a given relationship. Throughout interactions, the content and the relationship take turns in being at either the foreground or the background.

Section 3: Basic precepts of interpersonal communication in an intercultural encounter

- An individual’s socio-cultural background influences his/her way of communication leading to different communication practices.
- Communication can lend the means how one constructs one’s multifaceted identity (gender; age; ethnic, national, geographical, historical, political, and linguistic memberships, etc.)

- Any interpersonal communication to some extent is also intercultural communication insofar as each of us has different socio-cultural (including all membership categories) backgrounds/experiences, influencing our way of communicating; this is why it is preferable talking about *interpersonal communication in an intercultural encounter or perspective/dimension* (and not just 'intercultural communication').
- The more the communication practices and mental representations are different among interlocutors, the more misunderstandings (conscious) and miscommunications (unconscious) may occur (e.g. the mental representation of 'family' is not the same around the world).
- No intercultural communication advice! The emphasis is on the acquisition and application of important skills involving:
 - active listening (using the acoustic-auditive communication channel)
 - observing the others and the situation (using the visual communication channel)

Section 4: Basic principles to overcome complexity and avoid/prevent communication barriers

- In order to avoid the creation of communication barriers we may not be even aware of, it is crucial for us to communicate the same meaning:
 - with the different means (words, voice, body, visual elements)
 - on the different planes
- Great care needs to be allotted to the categorisation (or non) of individuals; it is of utmost importance to suspend judgements and avoid prejudices and labels.
- Highly recommended is the use of clear, non-ambiguous verbal messages. Most people more easily understand plain language based on active constructions whenever possible and free from passive and impersonal constructions, technical terminology, and abbreviations.
- Another important recommendation involves supporting verbal messages through the other communication means (voice, body, visual elements) according to the different situations. Communication between interlocutors benefits a lot when the supplier of information knows basic verbal communication techniques like repeating and reformulating messages, asking questions, etc.
- Both interlocutors need basic knowledge about bureaucratic-institutional communication:
 - written communication: the case of filling in forms
 - spoken communication, i.e. talk-in-interaction as in the case of public or private service situations
- It is crucial for interlocutors to discover, acknowledge and respect, and to NEVER offend each other's self-esteem by becoming aware and skilled in:
 - principles of inclusive communication
 - the basics of hate-speech/hate-communication, i.e. how those messages are constructed and how to deconstruct them.
 - the recognition and understanding of negative, excluding, discriminating, xenophobic (Islamophobic, Afrophobic, sexist, etc.) and racist messages (including all levels of communication not only words and discourse since even a voice/tone can hide harmful messages)

- the acquisition of skills and attitudes to contrast such messages (i.e. the ability and fortitude to tackle the difference between intentional and perceived messages)
- Another feature worth considering is how an individual's learning patterns (see Section 4.1) influence his/her ways of communicating.
- Interlocutors need to make time during which they engage in meta-communication, i.e. reflecting and talking on their own communication practices, what works and what does not, and how they can render it better, especially in given contexts to explain it to people with a different cultural background.

Following these principles, we have worked out three reference systems, based on the Level5 approach, for assessing inclusive communication competencies respectively for Lead-Mentors, Mentors and Migrants.

Facilitating inclusive communication

A Reference System for trainers/(training) organizations to prepare Lead-Mentors

The following Reference System was designed specifically for trainers and their organizations to prepare prospective Lead-Mentors (trainees) in the field of InterCultural Communication (ICC) with particular focus on Inclusive Communication. A trainer/facilitator can help trainees to become aware of their initial competence level in the three competence dimensions, i.e. theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and personal attitudes and guide trainees to reach higher levels of competence. Each dimension is structured in 5 levels of learning (1-5), where 1 is the lowest level and 5 the highest level.

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Reference System: Facilitating Inclusive Communication in an Intercultural Encounter for DREAMM Lead-Mentors

	KNOWLEDGE		SKILLS		ATTITUDES	
L	Level Titles	Level description	Level Titles	Level description	Level Titles	Level description
5	Knowing where else (strategic transfer)	Knowing how to transfer inclusive intercultural communication techniques & strategies into new and different contexts and situations; how to make use of 'alternative narratives' *	Developing, constructing, transferring	Adapting and developing inclusive intercultural communication techniques & strategies in new contexts; constructing 'alternative narratives'	Incorporation	Being determined to transfer inclusive communication techniques & strategies in new contexts. Inspiring others to apply the inclusive communication techniques & strategies and to implement 'alternative narratives'
4	Knowing when (implicit understanding)	Knowing when and how to interact in an inclusive way and to apply anti-discriminatory communication techniques & strategies in intercultural encounters	Discovering, acting independently	Facilitating intercultural communication techniques & strategies on a given case	Commitment	Being determined to explore and improve the own communication competences regarding intercultural encounters and to contrast discriminatory communication techniques & strategies
3	Knowing how	Knowing the three main challenges of intercultural communication (language, stereotypical discourses, social inclusion & justice) creating misunderstanding and miscommunication and how to prevent or overcome such barriers	Deciding, selecting	Distinguishing between inclusive and discriminatory communication techniques & strategies in defined assignments	Motivation, appreciation	Being motivated to implement inclusive communication techniques & strategies
2	Knowing why (distant understanding)	Understanding why interpersonal communication in an intercultural perspective has its benefits for implementing DREAMM	Using, Imitating	Exercising and trying out singular intercultural communication tools provided by others	Perspective taking	Being curious and interested about observing communication techniques & strategies in intercultural encounters
1	Knowing what	Knowing that interpersonal communication in intercultural encounters needs to be observed without judgements and that instead 'intercultural communication advice' is based on stereotypes leading to prejudices	Perceiving	Recognising that the implementation of DREAMM requires new training in interpersonal communication from an intercultural perspective	Self-orientation	Perceiving inclusive communication techniques & strategies generally

* For 'Alternative Narratives' see "10 criteria for the creation of effective alternative narratives on diversity", prepared by Mr. Daniel De Torres for the Council of Europe, [Urban citizenship and undocumented migration \(coe.int\)](http://urban.citizenshipandundocumentedmigration(coe.int)).

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A Reference System for Lead-Mentors to prepare Mentors

The following Reference System was designed specifically for Lead-Mentors to prepare prospective Mentors in the field of InterCultural Communication (ICC) with particular focus on Inclusive Communication. A Lead-Mentor acting as facilitator can help Mentors (trainees) to become aware of their initial competence level in the three competence dimensions, i.e. theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and personal attitudes and guide trainees to reach higher levels of competence. Each dimension is structured in 5 levels of learning (1-5), where 1 is the lowest level and 5 the highest level.

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Reference System: Facilitating Inclusive Communication in an Intercultural Encounter for DREAMM Mentors

L	COGNITIVE/KNOWLEDGE		ACTIVITY/SKILLS		AFFECTIVE/ATTITUDES	
	Level Titles	Individual description/ explanatory statement	Level Titles	Individual description/ explanatory statement	Level Titles	Individual description/ explanatory statement
5	Knowing where else (knowledge for transfer)	Having a broad theoretical background how to facilitate inclusive communication under different conditions and with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.	Developing, constructing, transferring	Developing new approaches and expertise to facilitate inclusive communication techniques & strategies in an intercultural dimension in different contexts and aimed at individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Supporting other Mentors.	Incorporation Internalisation	Having incorporated inclusive communication techniques & strategies to facilitate intercultural encounters. Motivating and supporting others to improve their communication competence to facilitate intercultural encounters.
4	Knowing when (implicit understanding)	Knowing when and how to implement the appropriate communication conditions to achieve the intercultural communication competences envisaged.	Discovering, acting independently	Researching for related theory, expanding own communication competence to facilitate appropriate inclusive communication techniques & strategies through specific communication exercises related to the competence development as envisaged.	Commitment	Being determined to explore and improve theory and practice of facilitating intercultural encounters through inclusive communication techniques & strategies. Finding it important to be creative in this respect.
3	Knowing how	Knowing how to facilitate inclusive communication using multiple communication means, techniques & strategies to prevent or overcome communication barriers considering the interlocutors' cultural and experiential background and language proficiency and avoiding simplistic 'intercultural communication advice'.	Deciding, selecting	Facilitating inclusive communication techniques & strategies by selecting from a repertoire of known approaches. Selecting and trying out appropriate formats of observing individuals interactions in intercultural encounters	Appreciation Motivation	Valuing inclusive communication techniques & strategies as format for learners to develop competences and being motivated to improve one's own communication competence to facilitate them.
2	Knowing why/ (distant understanding)	Knowing that there is an intercultural dimension in communication which concerns all involved individuals and that it can lead not only to misunderstanding (being aware of communication problems) but also to miscommunication (not being aware of communication problems).	Using, Imitating	Facilitating inclusive communication techniques & strategies as instructed or imitated by others.	Curiosity, Perspective taking	Being interested in facilitating inclusive communication settings in one's own work and to improve one's own competence to do so.
1	Knowing what/ knowing that	Knowing what communication in an intercultural encounter is and which role a facilitator has in it.	Perceiving	Recognising inclusive communication techniques & strategies and perceiving the advantages for constructive relationships.	Self-oriented, neutral	Feeling that one's own competence is sufficient to facilitate inclusive communication settings.

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A Reference System for Mentors to prepare newly arrived Third-Country Nationals

The following Reference System was designed specifically for Mentors to prepare newly arrived Migrants with Third-Country Background (TCN) to better cope with InterCultural Communication (ICC) issues in a new language and environment. A Mentor acting as facilitator can help Migrants (trainees) to become aware of their initial competence level in the three competence dimensions, i.e. theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and personal attitudes regarding communication techniques and strategies in an intercultural encounter as integration competence and guide trainees to reach higher levels of competence in this respect. Each dimension is structured in 5 levels of learning (1-5), where 1 is the lowest level and 5 the highest level.

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Reference System: Acquiring Communication Techniques & Strategies in an Intercultural Encounter as Integration competence for Newly Arrived Migrants with Third-Country backgrounds

	COGNITIVE / KNOWLEDGE		ACTIVITY		AFFECTIVE	
L	Level Titles	Individual description/ explanatory statement	Level Titles	Individual description/ explanatory statement	Level Titles	Individual description/ explanatory statement
5	Knowing where else (knowledge for transfer)	Having a broad theoretical / metacognitive background how to apply appropriate language & communication practices and activities within joint community actions.	Developing, constructing, transferring	Developing new language & communication practices to integrate, being an active member of joint community actions. Supporting others in one's own community.	Incorporation, Internalisation	Having incorporated language & communication practices to integrate and be an active member of Joint Community Actions. Motivating and supporting other migrants to improve their language & communication competence to facilitate their integration process.
4	Knowing when (implicit understanding)	Knowing when and how to use appropriate language & communication practices and activities to integrate and apply the knowledge within joint community actions.	Discovering, acting independently	Actively participating in Joint Community Actions Constantly expanding one's own language and communication competences to integrate in the new society and within joint community actions. Sharing one's own cultural references in joint developments	Commitment	Being determined to explore and improve how to better communicate with members of the new society and join also unknown communities. Finding it important to be creative in this respect. To be committed to exceed the DREAMM offers.
3	Knowing how	Having a sufficient knowledge of the new language to communicate in the new society and within joint community actions.	Deciding, selecting	Regularly participating in the DREAMM offers, language cafes, communication workshops and becoming involved in joint community actions. Solving more complex (sustaining) individual communication problems.	Appreciation, Motivation	Being motivated to continue to participate in language & communication activities provided.
2	Knowing why (distant understanding)	Knowing that (and why) communicating in the new language is essential for integration.	Using, Imitating	Taking part in language & communication activities when being instructed. Participating in language cafes. Starting to solve individual problems through an appropriate language and communication.	Curiosity, Perspective taking	Being interested to participate in additional language & communication activities.
1	Knowing what/ knowing that	Knowing that communicating in a new language is important to get along in the new society.	Perceiving	Recognising certain communication practices as mandatory (e.g., asking for help, asking directions, filling forms, etc.)	Self-oriented, neutral	No emotional connection to the communication activities offered. Not feeling language & communication barriers. Feeling that there is no need to learn a new language and new communication practices.

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