Intercultural Capability Glossary

Culture

A set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society or social group; including art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs. Each culture is a sum of assumptions and practices shared by members of a group distinguishing them from other groups.

Cultural diversity

The existence of a wide variety of cultures in the world today.

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 intercultural interactions.

Cultural practices

The way culture is expressed and attributes of cultural groups which range from easily observed characteristics such as group membership, cultural celebrations, customs, traditions, language and everyday ways of doing things, to less readily observed attributes such as values, attitudes, obligations, roles, religious beliefs and ways of thinking.

Empathy

The ability to identify and understand the thoughts, feelings or emotions of someone else. 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 intercultural understanding.