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From multicultural to intercultural class

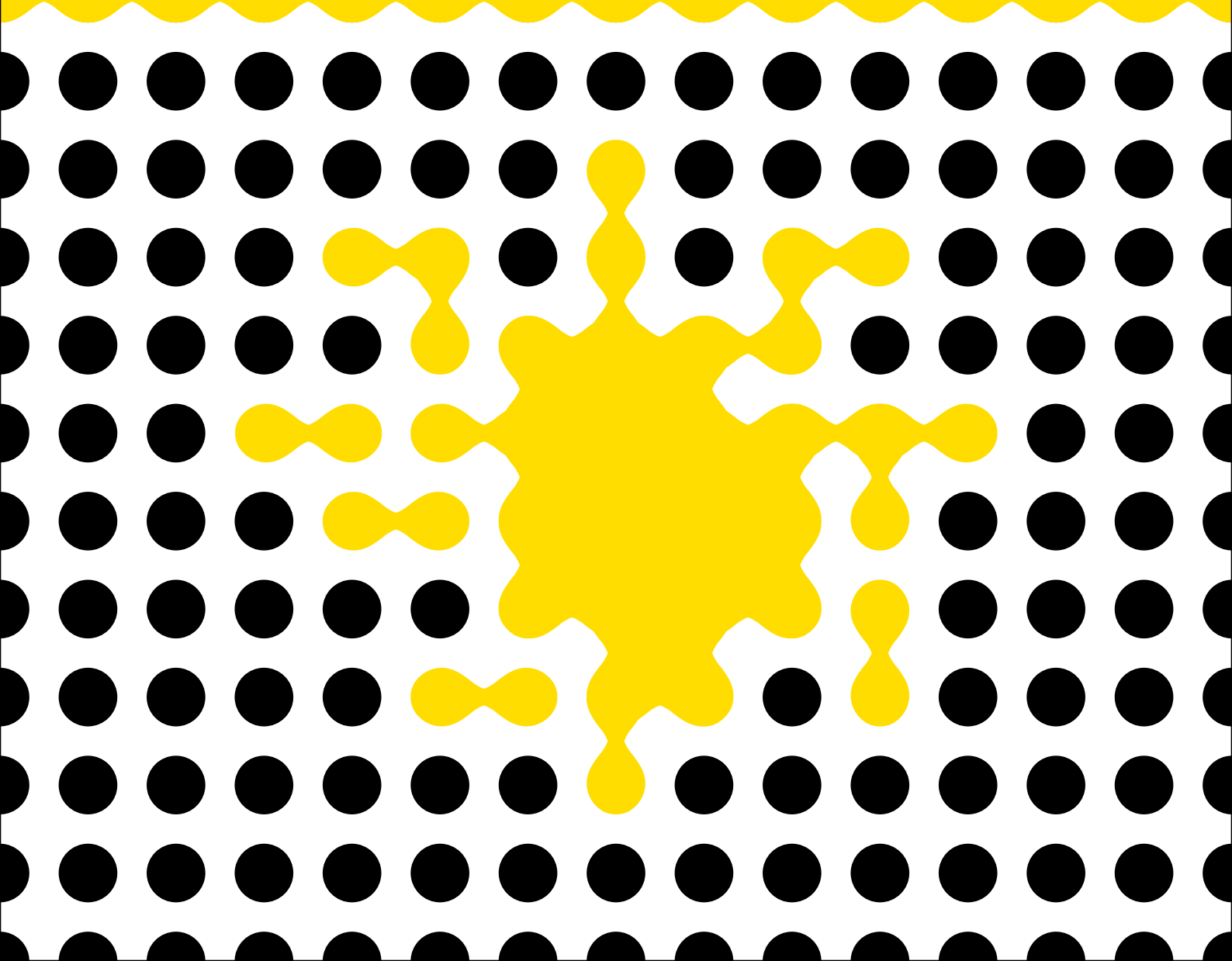


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INTRODUCTION

If you are here, it is likely that you are considering developing the competence necessary to build intercultural relations. This is great news!

Following the escalation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Poland became the destination for hundreds of thousands of young refugees and forced migrants. Our society – often very homogeneous – became multicultural nearly overnight.

In these circumstances, teachers in particular have an important role to play in supporting the migrants. They can help young people in a multicultural setting, i.e. an environment comprising people of various cultural, ethnic, national or religious backgrounds, build an intercultural community in which they can live in harmony and thrive.

For this to happen, we need intercultural competence – to be able to approach people from other, often unknown cultures with empathy and at the same time have an understanding of our own culture. Learning new behaviours is a long and complex process. Watching ourselves and others carefully will always be helpful. Basic knowledge, to be found in this manual, is also important. It will help you better understand how culture influences the behaviour of pupils. Equipped with such knowledge you will be able to build positive relationships and better navigate the intersection of cultures.

This manual has been intended as a practical tool for development. It provides basic knowledge and leaves room for thought and putting theory into practice. It explains phenomena, presents concepts and patterns, but also gives tasks to complete and questions to answer. If you wish, you can write down your answers on a piece of paper. It might help you reflect on what you have read and structure your knowledge.

Enjoy the read!



PART 1 THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL COMMUNITY

CULTURE



What is culture? What are its components? What do you associate culture with?
Write down as many manifestations of culture as you can.

CULTURE

is a set of behaviours, norms and values that a group of people (ethnic, national or religious) “agreed” on. Individual cultures have their individual practices that are passed on from one generation to the next and derive from values – beliefs about what is important, what must be cultivated and nurtured.

Culture is a complex concept. To understand it better, we often refer to an iceberg. Some elements and manifestations of culture can be easily seen – these are behaviours. Other – norms and values that influence the behaviours – are hidden, more difficult to observe and grasp.



..... The cultural iceberg



..... Understanding a culture

Have you ever been to Spain on New Year's Eve? If yes, did you notice bunches of exactly twelve grapes available in shops and markets? Do you know why they are sold?

If you do, then you are equipped with some knowledge and cultural competence associated with Spain. If not, why not find out (check a book, the Internet or ask a person from Spain that you know)?

This way, people in Spain get ready for the new year – on New Year's Eve, at midnight, they eat one grape with every stroke of the clock, hoping it will bring them luck. Some go even further: stand on the right foot to start the new year off with the left one, believed to be the luckier of the two.

Let's examine this custom using the iceberg metaphor.

More and more grapes appear in shops ahead of the New Year's Eve. They are often sold in small packets or in bunches of twelve. This is the most visible manifestation of the culture (the tip of the iceberg). If we happen to be on Madrid's Puerta del Sol or in a Spanish home on 31 December, we will notice that people eat the grapes in a special way.



Let's dive deeper to get more information. Most probably, this custom dates back to 1909 when farmers had exceptionally good harvest and to boost their sales they spread a gossip about grapes bringing luck. By the end of the old year, they sold all their produce. This is how a custom was born that has now been observed for over a century.

Behaviours: selling specially prepared grapes and eating them on New Year's Eve

Norms: the ritual of eating grapes at a specific time and in a specific way; a custom passed on from one generation to the next since 1909

Values:

- high status of farmers and agriculture (we treat them seriously – both back in 1909, when people believed in what the farmers said, and today, when agriculture is one of Spain's main branches of industry)
- luck (spirituality, magic, belief in the supernatural and in helping the luck with the right rituals)



Which of the manifestations of culture that you wrote down will be on the tip of the iceberg and which – deeper down? Sketch out an iceberg and write your examples in the right places.



What behaviours practised by Poles can draw the attention of or surprise people from other cultures? Try to map one such behaviour as an iceberg. What do you think is the norm and value that underlie the behaviour?



What behaviours of non-Polish pupils drew your attention or surprised you? Try to map one such behaviour as an iceberg. What do you think is the norm and value that underlie the behaviour?



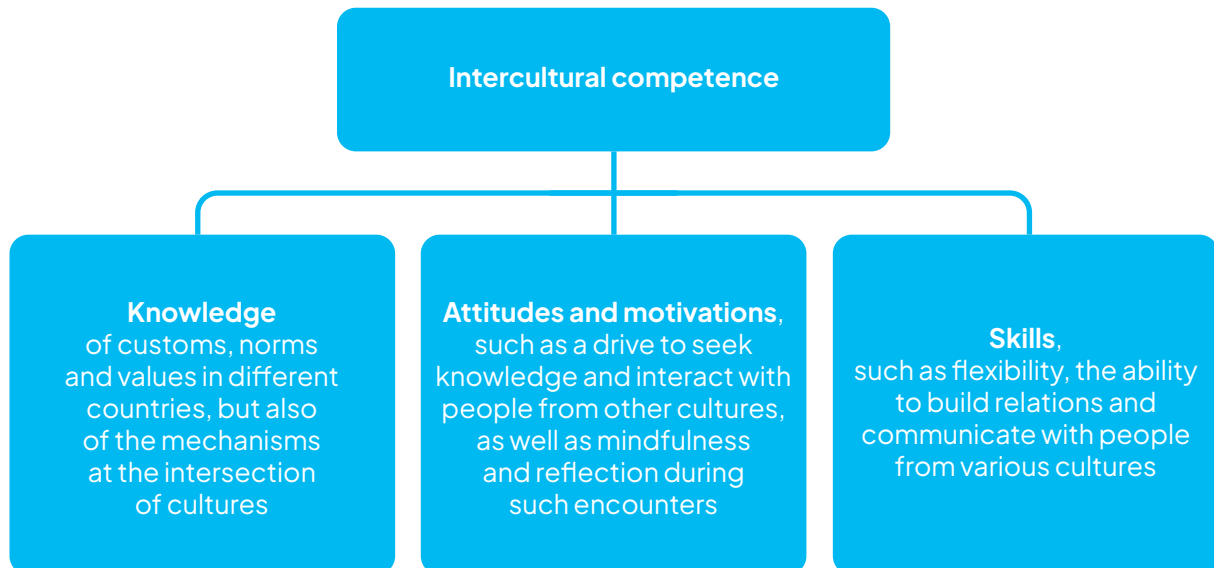
INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

The culture of every country can be presented as an iceberg. To navigate between the two icebergs effectively, we need the right competence. Just like navigating between two or more cultures.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

is the ability to function effectively across cultures and with people from different cultural backgrounds.

..... Components of intercultural competence



..... Knowledge check

Below you will find several questions about the three areas of intercultural competence. You may be asked about things you know, but there may be things new to you. This way you will be able to check which areas you are highly competent in, which are at a satisfactory level and which you could further work on. Of course, the results are only a guideline. The best way to check your intercultural competence is to use it in interactions with people from other cultures. The information you will find below can help you prepare for such encounters. While reading it, pay special attention to the areas in which you scored lower in the test.

Rate your knowledge, attitudes and skills regarding multiculturalism (where 1 means that you know little and 5 that you know a lot).

TEST				
KNOWLEDGE				
I can recognise the impacts that culture, nationality and ethnic background have on everyday situations in my own culture. I understand how norms, beliefs and values are formed and acquired and how people learn specific cultural practices.				
1	2	3	4	5
I have the knowledge of my own (e.g. Polish) culture – of the main norms, values and cultural practices. I know how they compare with the norms and values of people from other countries.				
1	2	3	4	5
I am familiar with the various acculturation models and dimensions and with how one adjusts to living in a new culture. I can give examples of subtle and often covert symptoms of acculturative stress and specific behaviours that can result from it.				
1	2	3	4	5
I am familiar with the basic theories about cultural differences and intercultural communication. I can give examples of such differences across cultural dimensions.				
1	2	3	4	5

ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATIONS

I analyse my attitude to individual cultural groups. I examine which groups I am prejudiced against and which I am positive about. I notice which groups I am more familiar with and which less so (how well I understand their situation and needs). I know around which groups I feel comfortable and around which – awkward.

1

2

3

4

5

I seek to learn about the situations and needs of representatives of the cultures I am less familiar with, less open to and with which I feel less at ease and more insecure.

1

2

3

4

5

I can understand other points of view, behaviours, values and objectives.
I try to accept them.

1

2

3

4

5

I tolerate ambiguity. I am ready to engage in teaching (myself and others) that questions beliefs and values (mine and those of others) or that often has no right answers.

1

2

3

4

5

SKILLS

I know how to build good relationships with people from other cultures so that every person feels an equal member of the class or school.

1

2

3

4

5

While communicating with others, I take note of their habits and cultural values.

1

2

3

4

5

I am a good observer. I have the right skills to effectively intervene in difficult situations or conflicts in a multicultural classroom.

1

2

3

4

5

I minimise the impact of language barriers when teaching – during class I use various means to introduce new knowledge.

1

2

3

4

5



If there are many fives and fours on your scales, then most likely you have had many multicultural experiences, you can draw conclusions and find it easy to introduce new elements to your behaviour. However, this is not the most common starting point for intercultural relationships. The majority of people first learn to live in one culture and in more homogeneous groups. Only when they gain multicultural experiences do they see the similarities and differences between cultures. If they are ready, they review their own knowledge and skills and learn new ways of thinking and new behaviours. If you chose ones and twos, you have so much yet to discover! Remember that the results of the test are only a guideline.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION

ETHNOCENTRISM

Putting one's culture (Greek *ethnos*) in the centre while disregarding or not seeing cultural differences. In its extreme forms, ethnocentrism may manifest itself in attitudes of dislike or hostility toward members of other groups resulting specifically from the lack of contacts with other cultures or poor knowledge about them.

Example:

Not seeing or not acknowledging the cultural differences between the people from Poland and Ukraine. Though Ukrainian nationals have lived in Poland and have been our neighbours for many years, we have shown little interest in them and their culture. We assumed that we are very similar. Only in 2022, when much more people from Ukraine arrived in Poland, did we start noticing their cultural distinctiveness. Some people, seeing the differences between the two nations, say: "they are exactly the same as we



were a dozen or so years ago. But my moved on” (meaning that Ukraine has not and is lagging behind).



What examples of ethnocentrism can you name (think about yourself and other people)?

The first step to overcome the barrier:

Use and nurture mindfulness and reflection.



MINDFULNESS is a practice of observing the world, sticking to the facts and broadening one’s range of vision so as to really see the various aspects of reality.

From the classroom:

I look at what the pupils in my class bring to school for breakfast and I notice that it varies depending on what country the child comes from (in general: most often Polish children have a sandwich and an apple, Syrian have pita bread, falafels and olives, and Ukrainian come without breakfast).



REFLECTION is an ability to refrain oneself from making hasty judgements. A reflective person will first try to realise their own assumptions (about themselves and others) and take it into account when forming opinions.

From the classroom:

If I am surprised by something, before making a judgement (such as: “poor Ukrainian children walk around hungry”), I will reflect on where the difference comes from (as far as food is concerned, it is the climate, geography and cultural and religious practices). I will find out what the link between food and values and cultural messages is. I will dig into the attitude to food in migrant families. What children bring to school for breakfast can tell me how well they have adapted to the host culture and what choices the child’s family has made (does it want to assimilate, integrate or is it marginalised).



WE-THEY DICHOTOMY

The tendency to form groups and judge one's own using other standards than those used for the other group. We are more familiar with our cultural or national group. It is our source of pride and self-esteem, so we tend to be biased in favour of the group and its members. We view other groups with distrust and are more critical of them. We also perceive other groups as homogeneous – we take a mental shortcut and assume that members of other groups are more similar to one another than members of our own community.

Example:

A teacher said: “our kids were very eager to help them and their children (referring to the Ukrainians as “them” and to the Polish pupils as “our children”, even though they are all members of the same school community).



Can you give examples of the we-they distinction? Think how it can manifest itself in your actions and the actions of others.

The first step to overcome the barrier:

Being ready to interact not only based on the distinctive ethnic categories. Seeking both differences and similarities.

From the classroom:

When I hold a song contest at school, I encourage the pupils to look for interesting topics that are not linked to their nationality (e.g. songs about love), so that they don't sing national songs. If it turns out that the songs have something in common (e.g. the same musical genre or topic) or they are different (different attitudes to love in various countries), I discuss it with the pupils.



LANGUAGE BARRIER

A challenge to communication with people from other countries because we don't know their language. We say that communicating is a challenge, not that it is impossible, because people can communicate even without formal language, e.g. using non-verbal communication, with the help of interpreters, dictionaries and translators or a third language. The barrier can not only be the language, but also the attitude and fears that prevent us from digging into the resources that help us communicate.

Example:

Children and teenagers are very fluent in using various software and applications available on the Internet. But at the same time they don't form relationships with non-Polish pupils fearing that they will not be able to communicate.



Do you know of situations when a language barrier posed a challenge? *Think of examples from your own life or someone you know.*

The first step to overcome the barrier:

Introducing multilingualism and using various communication channels despite feeling embarrassed, anxious and uncertain. Being less critical of errors.

From the classroom:

I encourage young people to use pictograms and graphics. I give them assignments in which they use visual materials or films, not writing. I don't punish (myself or others) for language mistakes. Even if the answer is not perfect, I try to understand what it means, like in the example below:

**Thiz sentens have errors, bat yu dont have two mach truble wiz riding ti.
Yu don't rid evry leter sepretly, bat hole wordz.**



PART 2

ADAPTING TO THE LIFE IN A NEW CULTURE AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING A MIGRANT OR A REFUGEE

Jamid's story

Jamid is a schoolboy and comes from Afganistan. In August 2021, when Taliban took control, he fled the country with his parents – interpreters who worked with various embassies (also the Polish one) and didn't feel safe in their home country. In Poland, Jamid was admitted to fifth class (a grade lower than his age would suggest) of a primary school in the centre of a big city. Because Jamid's parents moved in cosmopolitan circles, initially Jamid easily found his place in the new reality. He was eager to learn a new language, talked about his country of origin, shared food during breakfast with friends, but was even happier to taste what Polish pupils offered him.

However, after a few months, Jamid's teacher noticed something that worried her – Jamid became less engaged, less lively and did not smile as much as before. He did not want to prepare presentations about Afghan traditions for an international evening at school – he said that his Polish was too poor and that friends would make fun of him.

Jamid was doing worse in class, also because he missed many days of school – apparently because he was sick. Once, after another long absence, the boy got into an argument with a friend and made quite a scene during a break: a short exchange with a pupil in the school corridor ended with Jamid calling out: “Polish idiots”, “hate” and “stupid nation”. When the teacher intervened, Jamid kept repeating the same, confusing sentences. He was also getting louder, hitting the table and waving his arms.





How did the boy behave during the various stages of his stay (in the beginning, after some time, lately)? Which behaviour surprised the teacher? Write down examples of behaviour during the various stages of Jamid's stay.



What do you think were the reasons for the change in the boy's behaviour? Try to find several possible reasons.

CULTURAL CHANGE: STAGES AND SYMPTOMS OF ACCULTURATIVE STRESS¹

Intercultural psychology has thoroughly examined and described the response of migrants and refugees to the cultural change. However, both the people who have found themselves in a foreign country and are going through the process, and the persons around them, who have not had such experience, often find it difficult to understand the feelings and changes it brings.

A change, not only a cultural one, usually results in a higher stress level and strong emotional reactions. Denial, resistance and exploration are natural stages of our response to a change of jobs, schools, homes or even our haircut ... But when we move to another country, much more changes. Apathy, confusion, anger, frustration and many other intense emotions (also positive ones) are part of an extended adaptation process known as an acculturative stress. The emotions are a direct consequence of changes that migrants experience when faced with people having different cultural backgrounds.

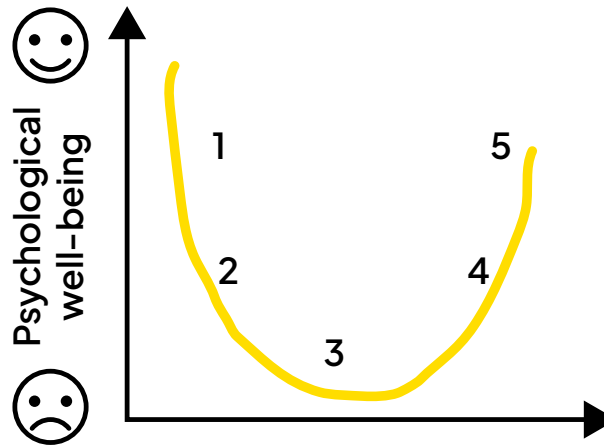
¹ Based on: Cieślukowska D. (2012), *Psychologiczne i społeczne konsekwencje wyjazdu do innego kraju* [in:] A. Chmielecka [ed.], *Od migracji do integracji. Vademecum*, Warsaw: Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights https://remedium.gumed.edu.pl/attachment/attachment/16152/Od_migracji_do_integracji_Vademecum.pdf [accessed: 15 June 2023].



Adapting to the life in a new country brings changes to the emotional state. Those undergoing it find it difficult to notice and name the states they are going through. Stress is a psychological reaction to a new environment. It occurs specifically when the cultural circumstances are very different from those before. Every day, a person in a new country experiences many different emotions that make a dynamic pattern.

Though adaptation can be discussed using several various models, the most popular is the classic “U-curve”. It shows the main elements of an acculturative stress: its variability and dynamics and the emotions typical of every stage. The acculturative stress follows the below pattern most often in people who have decided to go abroad at their own will. The majority of phases occur during adaptation, though not necessarily in the same order.

“U-curve” of the acculturative stress



1 - honeymoon stage, 2 - confrontation, 3 - culture shock, 4 - adaptation, 5 - double culture

Let's go back to Jamid. The truth is that the decision to leave the country was not his. As is the case of the majority of children, it was the parents who made the decision. The family had no influence on the situation that had made them leave (not feeling safe in their own country). Nevertheless, at the beginning, Jamid seemed happy and had positive experiences.



The first stage is called **honeymoon (1)**. Something has changed – the differences between the “before” and “after” (i.e. between the home country and the host country) are seen and experienced. They are fascinating, they invite exploration, motivate to act and learn what’s new. At this stage, people are curious, euphoric and enthusiastic about the new culture. Even people who come to a new country under pressure, were less eager or somehow forced to come (e.g. because they fled their own country for fear of persecution), can initially experience the same emotions – especially peace, joy or relief to have escaped to safety.

At the beginning, Jamid had no problems with learning a new language. He was keen to share his stories and traditional food, but also keen to taste the food and learn about the culture of the new country. He may have had it easier thanks to his earlier experiences or his personality. It was also the initial stage of his adaptation.

The second stage is **confrontation (2)**. This is the time when the cultural differences make everyday life more difficult. A migrant or refugee is confronted with situations they cannot manage effectively and which back in the home country were simple and straightforward. They can feel incompetent, self-conscious, confused, insecure, guilty or embarrassed.

At some point, Jamid lost his enthusiasm and eagerness. This could be because he lost his self-confidence and the feeling of self-agency in the new conditions and became homesick. He did not want to make the presentation, fearing that he would make linguistic errors and that the presentation would get a negative reaction from other pupils.



One of possible defence mechanisms can be reversing the blame – from oneself onto the outside, the new culture and its representatives. This is the stage of **separation** or **culture shock (3)**. Individuals want to reject the new environment. They are aloof and increasingly negative about all that is different from their home country. They can mock the new culture, feel very frustrated and hostile towards the people of the host country. They are often exhausted, apathetic, lacking physical and cognitive strengths. They are also 80 per cent more like to fall ill at this time, with psychosomatic disorders being difficult to treat, if seen in only medical terms.

Jamid was falling ill, missed out on school and fell behind academically. He felt dejected, angry with friends, made generalisations about and felt animosity or even hostility towards the host country. The way Jamid communicated with the teacher – kept repeating the same, hardly understandable words, shouted, hit the table, waved his arms – can suggest that he was under severe stress and used a culturally conditioned style of communication, more typical of expressive cultures. This shows that the boy did not yet adapt to the new environment, though in the beginning it may have seemed otherwise.

With time, if migrants are given the right support and use their own resources, usually the culture shock and separation go away. The difficult emotions fade or are less frequent and the person is doing much better in the reality which they have already become more accustomed to. They are more willing to go back to their social, professional or school life. It's time for a peaceful **adaptation (4)** stage when intercultural sensitivity sets in. The emotions are more constructive: joy, satisfaction, feeling of success. One begins to perceive and experience situations as they are. Migrants cannot only see the positives and negatives of the new reality, but also develop skills and resources to adapt and expand one's repertoire of behaviours.



We don't know what happened to Jamid. But we can think how school could support him and his family.

The last stage of the process is **double culture – high intercultural competence (5)**. It can be developed only by those who have spent enough time in their new country (a few years, at least). At this stage, people learn which emotions should be evoked by various events (on an individual, social and cultural level) and which emotions are desired in a given situation. What is characteristic of this stage is that a person is familiar both with the culture of their home country and the host country. Depending on the situation, they choose a behaviour that best suits the situation and their style. It is not only about “switching” to the “new”: culture, but also about adopting a more creative, synergistic and individual approach to rules, standards and values of both countries.

POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BEING A REFUGEE

Jamid can react in a certain way in the new environment, because apart from being an immigrant, he is also a refugee. We don't know the circumstances in which the boy left Afghanistan and came to Poland. In the host country, Jamid may experience not only all stages of the acculturative stress, but also a trauma which – if unnoticed and untreated – can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Not every refugee is at risk of trauma and not every person who suffers trauma will develop PTSD. However, being aware of the risk can serve as protection. Providing the right conditions and getting the right responses from those around can help prevent the destructive consequences from setting in.



Refugees change their place of permanent stay fearing persecutions. Unlike migrants, refugees are forced to flee as a result of a political or social situation (most often armed conflicts, but not only). Persons forced to leave their own country, their family, friends, work or school, face additional difficulties. If they had uneasy experiences in their home country, during their travel or in the host country, they may be more at risk of having to deal with stressors. And they can develop trauma or PTSD.

TRAUMA

A mental condition occurring after events that are or can be a threat to life and health. It is a response to sudden, unexpected changes that require more resources than a person can have without support from the outside. Trauma can result in permanent difficulties with returning to the earlier life.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

A mental health condition triggered by a stressful event (trauma) that a person cannot cope with or adapt to. PTSD is the effect of extreme difficulties.

Not everyone will develop PTSD after a trauma. Symptoms of PTSD appear after a few weeks or months after the trauma. Usually, they go away with time, but if not, they can result in personality changes. They cannot be disregarded. PTSD can be treated with psychotherapy and medications.



PTSD – symptoms



FOUR PILLARS OF PROTECTION AGAINST ACCULTURATIVE STRESS, TRAUMA OR PTSD

ONE – COMMUNITY: build a community in the class

In a well-organised class community, everyone feels at home and brings in their own unique qualities.

If pupils from other cultures join the class, and are also migrants or refugees, the class must get support to build and strengthen relationships. This requires time.



Building an intercultural community

GO BEYOND:	FOCUS ON:
team building activities	being together
taking action only at the beginning	permanent action
separate classes	every-day activities
activities delivered by third parties	activities (co)delivered by the children/teenagers

TWO – VISIBILITY: be mindful and reflective

When children from other countries join a class, things can go many ways. Don't assume that it will be difficult and challenging, don't be afraid of unexpected situations. It is possible that a migrant will easily adapt in the class and the class will benefit from the new circumstances. But be watchful of what is happening to the migrant child, the rest of the



class and you. Being aware of culture differences, adaptive stress, trauma or PTSD can help you notice symptoms that will tell you that the situation requires special treatment.

THREE – INCLUSION: include and treat equally

Behave the same way. Make sure that there are small things that strengthen the sense of belonging and encourage everyone – no matter their social or cultural background and experiences – to be themselves.

Make sure that everyone receives equal treatment and find something they could all work on together. Create opportunities for collaboration in an environment that is free from prejudice and hostility and promotes social standards that unite people.

You can try several different ways of giving information or instructions: speak, display text on screen, write it down, show where it is in a book, use drawings or graphic symbols, gestures, solid models, videos or movement.

FOUR – STRENGTHENING: support, but only where necessary

Keep an eye on how your actions affect the class. If necessary, modify the practices that don't work or bring in additional support. Remember that one of the basic needs is security. The school and class can (and even should) provide physical, emotional and information security. Schools can support migrants and refugees by providing the right structure and predictability and build a sense of belonging. It is important to introduce tasks and measures that are feasible and that help young people to focus on here and now, instead of evoking memories and homesickness.

Safe and friendly social relationships are the basis of adaptation to the new environment. If you notice symptoms of a crisis, you may offer psychological first aid (PFA), which the World Health Organization defines as “humane, supportive and practical assistance for people who are distressed”². It is not psychological counselling and need not be provided by mental health professionals. It can be offered by anyone.

² World Health Organization, (2011), *Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers*. Geneva: WHO, page 3, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/352503/WHO-EURO-2022-37325-37325-63907-pol.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [accessed: 15 June 2023].



“PFA involves the following themes:

- providing practical care and support, which does not intrude;
- assessing needs and concerns;
- helping people to address basic needs (for example, food and water, information);
- listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk;
- comforting people and helping them to feel calm;
- helping people connect to information, services and social supports;
- protecting people from further harm.”³

³ Ibid.



Yulia's story

Yulia fled the war in Ukraine with her grandmother. She has been in Poland for two months. Integrating her into the class is quite a challenge. Yulia is not eager to learn. She seems interested only in clothes and beauty products. It is difficult to find the right way to work with her. In the school, there are few people from other cultures, even from Ukraine. There are no resources and it is still unclear how to evaluate pupils who join mid-year and can't speak Polish. Yulia and her grandmother receive a lot of contradicting information. As far as relationships are concerned, the situation is also difficult. At the beginning, the class was happy to have got a new classmate. However, after a while, the pupils became totally indifferent. The teacher learnt that the other children in the class made fun of Yulia and gossiped about her. To make things better, the teacher invited Yulia's grandmother to a meeting. However, she had nothing to say – she listened to the information patiently and accepted everything. The teacher decided to speak also to Yulia, but she as well did not have any comments. The teacher could not understand why both the grandmother and Yulia behaved as if everything was OK. He had expected a bitter argument, complaints and blame put on the school, himself or the pupils. There were none.



Why do you think Yulia and her grandmother acted this way? Why did the teacher expect something else? Think about several possible reasons.

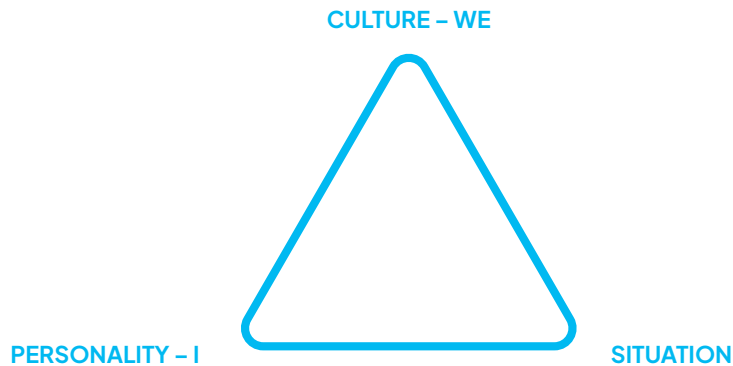
Based on our intuition, experiences and previous chapters, several hypotheses can be put forward. Yulia, and the more so her grandmother, might not have realised that as far as working with pupils from other countries is concerned, the education system is inexperienced and inefficient.



Perhaps, neither have noticed or been told about the other pupils' attitude towards Yulia. Maybe, being refugees, they both suffer from apathy resulting from the adaptive stress or PTSD.

The two women could behave the way they did, because of their personalities (lack of interest in school, inattentiveness, indifference) as well as of the situation (being a migrant, refugee and at risk of psychosocial consequences). Their actions may be also culture-specific. We all behave in a certain way because of our personality, the situation we are in and our cultural background. Each of these factors is equally important.

INFLUENCE TRIANGLE

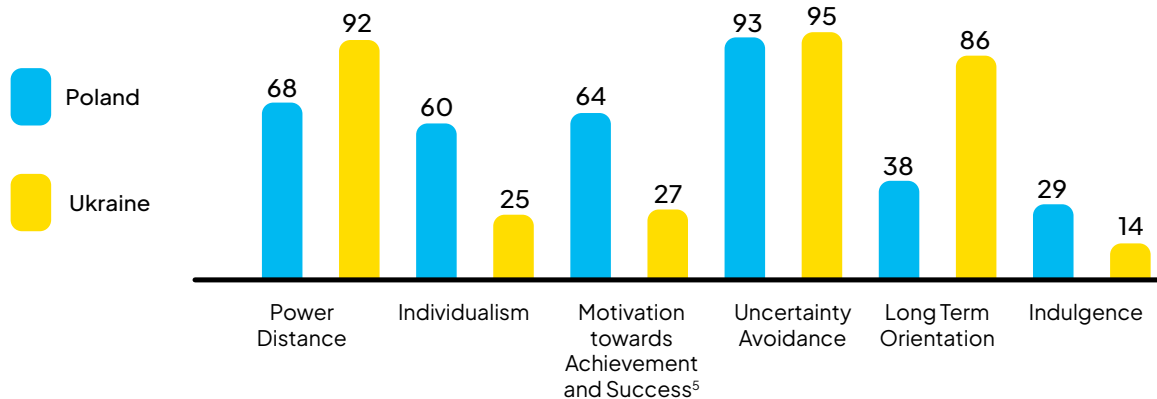


Persons with less experience in intercultural relationships may pay less attention to culture. We often tend to make the fundamental attribution error (i.e. overemphasising personal characteristics and ignoring situational and cultural factors).

In Yulia's story, culture can have a big impact. A comparison of cultures (e.g. Geert Hofstede's theory) shows that though Poland and Ukraine are neighbours, there are major culture differences between the two.



Culture comparison⁴



The results of Hofstede and his team's research show where Poles and Ukrainians differ. The teacher, unaware of the differences, could expect that Yulia and her grandmother would respond in a way that was more typical of Poles. However, the two women reacted in line with the patterns characteristic of their country.

In Yulia's story, nearly all dimensions (five out of six) could play a role. The research has revealed that Ukraine's culture is more hierarchical, less individualistic and less motivated towards achievement and success than the Polish one. Perhaps, Yulia and her grandmother did not want to criticise the school and Yulia's classmates openly because of the hierarchy. In societies where social hierarchy is important, people with authority are expected to be treated with respect and dignity and not approached directly. The two women could have attributed a higher status to their interlocutor – a teacher, a man or a host in the new country.

4 The data in the graph is based on the data available at <https://www.hofstede-insights.com> [accessed: 21 July 2023], a very practical tool to compare cultures developed by a team of culture analysts, researchers, facilitators and strategy advisers who refer to two publications: *Culture's Consequences* (1980, 2001 2nd edition) and *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (1991, newest edition 2010, co-authored with Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov). More books by Geert Hofstede are given at: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/about-geert-hofstede> [accessed: 21 July 2023].

5 At <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool> [accessed: 21 July 2023] we read: A high score (Decisive) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the winner / best in field – a value system that starts in school and continues throughout organisational life. A low score (Consensus-oriented) on the dimension means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. In a Consensus-oriented society one likes what one does.



It is also likely that the girl and her grandmother did not want to present their own, individual point of view for fear of disrupting the sense of community (togetherness) and harmony (feminine culture), which they had recently tried so hard to build. Ukraine's high score on the long term orientation dimension and low score on indulgence could also play their part. Having a tendency to think about the future, one can assume that there is no point in complaining about the present. If one considers life to be difficult and requiring sacrifice, complaints are also not welcome.

BASIC TYPES OF INTERCULTURAL DIFFERENCES

To interpret the behaviours of Yulia and her grandmother I used comparative research, the so-called **PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE** – scales with cultural dimensions selected by researchers that can be measured and compared to determine the relationships between various cultures.

There are interesting research projects carried out by: Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, Alfons Trompenaars and Erin Meyer.

Though usually people have much more in common than not, it is the differences that can be critical to interacting, establishing relationships and understanding the behaviours that are culturally determined.



The main differences examined by the researchers, which can be tricky in intercultural interactions, are the differences in the approach to:

EMOTIONS	
expressed EXPRESSION	not expressed RESTRAINT
SOCIAL STATUS	
important and respected HIERARCHY	not important EGALITARIANISM
TIME	
many things at once POLYCHRONIC	one thing at a time MONOCHRONIC
EFFECTIVENESS	
focusing on action TASK-ORIENTED	focusing on relationships and loyalty RELATIONSHIP-BASED
PEOPLE	
group and community interests COLLECTIVISM	individual focus INDIVIDUALISM
COMMUNICATION	
direct, verbal LOW-CONTEXT	not direct, nonverbal HIGH-CONTEXT



CONCLUSION

I hope that this manual has provided you with basic information that will help you establish and maintain intercultural relationships. I included here only the most important issues, but below are suggestions for further reading.

The information about intercultural mechanisms is the basis to understand what happens between people from various cultures. Putting it into practice helps develop the competence to improve our inter- and intracultural communication.

Everyone can expand their knowledge, shape their attitude and broaden their skills. It does not require heroism, but sensitivity, curiosity and practice. I hope that the mindfulness and reflection that you practised when reading this manual and answering the questions will help you in your everyday life. Careful observation of the world around and contemplation will help us navigate the diverse environment that we live in.



SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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