INTERNATIONALISING THE CURRICULUM (IOC)

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE – WHAT IT IS

> This guidance links to the principal pillar of Intercultural and International Engagement within the CU Education Strategy

"The 21st century workplace is one filled with diversity — with workers of different ages, different religions, different genders, different cultures, with different beliefs, ways of thinking, abilities, ways of communicating, and so much more. Many jobs today, regardless of location, require working with other people who are quite different from each other. While technical knowledge and subject knowledge are certainly important for success, they are not enough." (Deardorff 2015:1)

INTRODUCTION

Why are intercultural skills important?

Intercultural competences (ICC) have been determined by employers, educators and scholars as core graduate attributes (see resources on employer perspectives) that are much sought after in the workplace.

Increasing interdependencies in the world economy, the necessity for cross-border collaboration to achieve effective outcomes, the inevitability for global knowledge-exchange to formulate innovative solutions to local and global challenges, and the closeness offered by the internet and social media present both opportunities and challenges to individuals and organisations.

Research conducted by the British Council (2013) on the value of intercultural skills in the workplace found that *"communicating with customers, colleagues and partners across international borders is now an everyday occurrence for many workers around the world. Consequently, employers are under strong pressure to find employees who are not only technically proficient, but also culturally astute and able to thrive in a global work environment."*

As a result, our students should be able to articulate and demonstrate to an employer their competence in interacting and working with culturally and/or geographically diverse stakeholders. Regardless of discipline, sector or market, the changing nature of how companies operate have influenced employers' recruitment practices and the way in which they value intercultural skills in the workplace.

A DEFINITION

Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competence (ICC) as the ***"ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes."***

Deardorff developed the above definition as part of her thesis in consultation with leading scholars in the field. She employed a Delphi methodology described as "an iterative process with an identified group of experts, to develop a grounded-research framework that specified the agreed-upon essential elements of intercultural competence" (Deardorff 2015:2). Core components of intercultural competence established in this research were categorised under **knowledge**, **skills** and **attitudes**.

Coventry University often uses Deardorff's definition to underpin approaches and strategies for intercultural development however, alternative definitions do exist. Further valuable insights can be found in the *Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (SAGE 2009) which includes contributions from leading experts and scholars from a variety of fields including education, communication, psychology, social work, health care, conflict studies, etc.
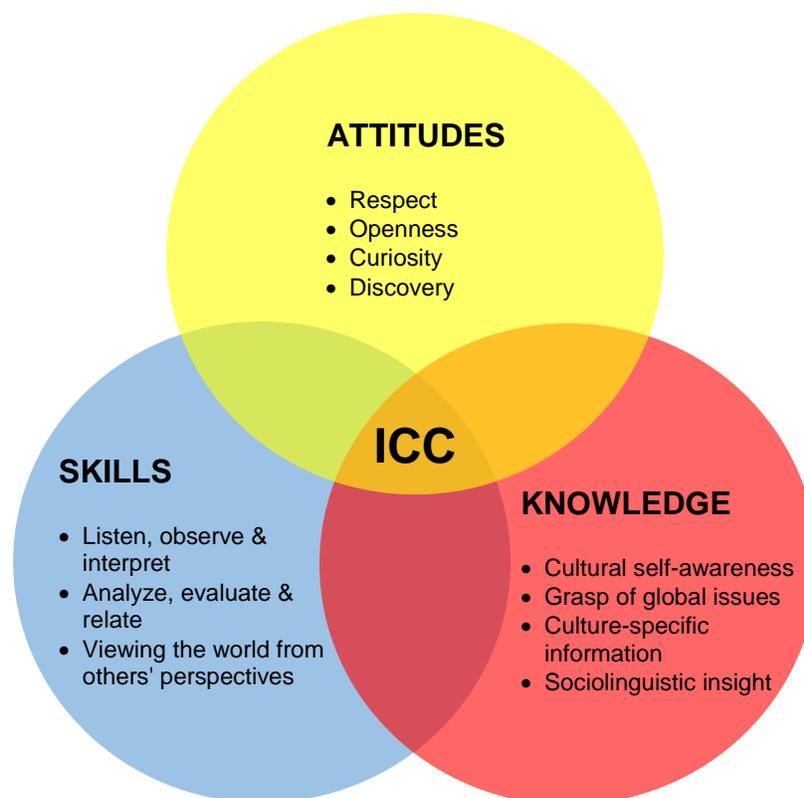
COMPONENTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

ATTITUDES

- Respect
- Openness
- Curiosity
- Discovery

ICC

SKILLS

- Listen, observe & interpret
- Analyze, evaluate & relate
- Viewing the world from others' perspectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Cultural self-awareness
- Grasp of global issues
- Culture-specific information
- Sociolinguistic insight

Diagram: adapted from Deardorff (2006) and McKinnon (n.d.)

ATTITUDES

According to Deardorff (2015:2) attitudes are foundational to the further development of knowledge and skills needed for intercultural competence.

- **Openness:** a willingness to risk and to move beyond one's comfort zone
- **Respect:** it is important to communicate and demonstrate that others are valued
- **Openness:** to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment

- **Curiosity:** seeking out intercultural interactions, viewing difference as a learning opportunity, being aware of one's own ignorance
- **Discovery:** tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty
- **Willingness:** to question what is usually taken for granted as 'normal' according to one's previously acquired knowledge and experience (CoE 2014:19)

KNOWLEDGE

According to Deardorff (2015:3), scholars reached consensus on the *"importance of understanding the world from others' perspectives…which has significant implications for higher education: How do different subjects and disciplines incorporate others' perspectives and intercultural experiences into their curriculum and programmes?"*

- **Cultural self-awareness:** the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity & worldview
- **Culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge:** including understanding other worldviews
- **Sociolinguistic awareness:** acquiring basic language skills, articulating differences in verbal/ non-verbal communication and adjusting one's speech to accommodate nationals from other cultures (McKinnon n.d.)
- **Understanding:** processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction, and of the socially constructed nature of knowledge (CoE 2014:19)

SKILLS

According to Deardorff (2015:3), skills address the processing of knowledge and critical self-reflection is an integral aspect of this. The Council of Europe (2014:20) include aspects of adaptability, flexibility and learning agility to the skill-set.

- **Processing:** observing, listening, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, relating (Deardorff 2015:3)
- **Multiperspectivity:** the ability to decentre from one's own perspective and to take other people's perspectives into consideration in addition to one's own
- **Empathy:** the ability to understand and respond to other people's thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings
- **Cognitive flexibility:** the ability to change and adapt one's way of thinking according to the situation or context
- **Adaptability:** skills in adapting one's behaviour to new cultural
- **Linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills:** including skills in managing breakdowns in communication

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