



PORTFOLIO: INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Lecturer: Jannie Oosting Course: Training Intercultural Competence



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Chapter 1: Introduction

My name is Stijn van der Grinten, I am eighteen years old and I was born and raised in the Netherlands, where I still reside. This portfolio will describe my experiences with interculturalism, and how I aim to become more interculturally competent.

Chapter 2: Intercultural Biography

I was born in Utrecht on the 23rd of September in 1999. I have two brothers, and a sister. My mother is Dutch, and so are both of her parents; my father, on the other hand, has a Portuguese mother and a French grandmother. Because of that, I learned some things about Portugal's culture as well, along with Dutch culture. When I was younger, we never really went to Portugal, but when my grandmother, who lived in the Netherlands before, moved to a retirement home in Lisbon, where she had lived before she met my grandfather, we started going there about once a year. I have a lot of family in Portugal, the most direct connections being my aunt and uncle. Most of the others are my father's cousins. My Portuguese family is quite eccentric; the family used to be on friendly terms with the dictator Salazar, who ruled until the late sixties, making them part of the regime's elite. Even now, after the revolution and the communist government that came with it, they still have some pretty large mansions in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra. Nevertheless, they're very friendly people, and it's always fun to go and see them. I think my father taught my siblings and me some of the southern European relaxedness, and I believe I also picked up their love for good food.

Aside from the family stuff, I've had quite a few intercultural experiences. To start off, in school we learned English, German and French. Besides just learning the languages, we also read a lot about their culture, especially during German, because all of my teachers who gave that class came from Germany themselves. Even more so with Greek and Latin, where we even got tested on our knowledge of those ancient cultures. Of course, these cultures are dead now, but I guess it does count as learning about another culture, very different from my own. I really liked Romans and Greeks, even to the point that I participated in a quiz about them, and made it to the national finals. This love for the ancient world resulted in me starting a study Ancient Cultures of the Mediterranean World, where I learned about Ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Ancient Jewish culture. While it was very interesting, I missed actually doing things, instead of just reading about things, which is why I changed studies after a year. During that time though, I learned a lot about how cultures can differ from each other on the most fundamental levels, and also about where many elements in our culture come from.

In middle school, we went to Taizé, a monastery where people from everywhere around the world come to learn about religion and spirituality. While I didn't really need religion in my life, I met some very nice people from other countries, mostly from France. In the five days we were there, we talked to them a lot, and learned about their cultures and the differences they have to our own. They taught us about their favorite food and the slangs they used, but also about their views on the world, which was very interesting.

Another time, we went to Strasbourg, specifically to the European Parliament, for a program called Euroscola. Apparently, we were actually supposed to win some national competition in order to go there, but our economics teacher knew the right people, so we could skip that process somehow. At Euroscola, we got to pretend to be members of the Parliament for one day, which was pretty cool. We met lots of people from all over Europe, and worked together with them on some exercises, and heard their views on the EU. Representatives from each country introduced their culture in a short presentation.

I've been on city trips to Germany many times, because it's so close to the Netherlands. I've only really seen the westernmost part though. I really like German culture, perhaps because it's very

similar to my own. I've also made some friends in middle school who were originally from Germany. On holidays, I usually go to southern Europe with my parents and siblings. France, Spain, Italy, and, of course, Portugal are favorites. On these trips we mostly visit the larger cities and the beaches. I think southern European cities are very beautiful. The streets are really wide and open, and the architecture, mostly in renaissance style, is just stunning. Most of all, I like the atmosphere there, very relaxed and laid-back. If I had to live in another country, I'd probably choose a southern European one.

I think I regard myself more as a European citizen than a Dutch one, because I can feel at home in most European countries. Now that I think of it, I've never actually been outside of Europe. I'd like to do so though, I think it'd be very interesting to see what it's like to be in a country that's *really* different from my own.

Chapter 3: Communication Style

Since I'm from a low-context culture, my communication style is relatively direct. Nevertheless, I always try to be very precise in what I say. I always try to extend my vocabulary as far as I can, partly because I am a huge language geek, partly because I want to be able to say what I mean as accurately as I can. I don't use too many words to describe things. However, if necessary, I can go into great detail about my opinions or things that interest me.

The language I'm most fluent in is Dutch. I rarely make errors while speaking or writing in this language, and I get annoyed (maybe a little too annoyed) when others do make mistakes. When this happens, I try to hide my annoyance, because my experiences have shown that people don't like being corrected on their spelling or grammar. I make exceptions for d/t errors and spacing errors. People who make those can expect a lengthy rant (unless they're dyslectic or non-native speakers of course. I am a slightly reasonable person).

I'm also quite proficient in English, but not nearly as fluent as I am in Dutch. I do really like the English language. Somehow everything sounds more professional and cool in English. I like to default all products I use to English, when I can, because it makes troubleshooting easier and sometimes offers functions that haven't been introduced in Dutch versions yet.

If an intercultural setting requires me to change my communication style, I'll gladly do so. The most important thing is, if you ask me, to always be polite. I think this can be achieved by either researching the etiquette of a culture beforehand, or asking the people you're communicating with what is customary. In any case, be patient with people when they don't understand you and don't be afraid to politely ask when you don't understand them.

Chapter 4: International Communication Barriers

So far, I haven't really had any true barriers yet, perhaps because I haven't been in other cultures for long stretches of time, perhaps because I haven't been to any countries with a vastly different communication style. The only small barriers I can think of are the times when I don't know a particular word in a language or when someone doesn't understand one of the words I'm using. This is usually resolved by explaining the word, using a synonym or putting the word in Google Translate.

Chapter 5: Intercultural Dimensions Hofstede

My culture has a low power distance; people call most superiors by their first name and talk to them about everyday things. Superiors rely on feedback from their inferiors and often take a listen to them. The Netherlands is also quite indulgent. People like having fun and are relatively outgoing. They often spend money the way they like and are pretty positive-minded.

Chapter 6: Learning goal(s)

Being a native in the country where I study, I have come up with a learning goal to learn about another country: I want to know the different German Bundesländer and the cultural differences between them. There are sixteen of them, so I want to read or talk about two every week. That way, I'll be done in eight weeks.

Chapter 7: Achievements

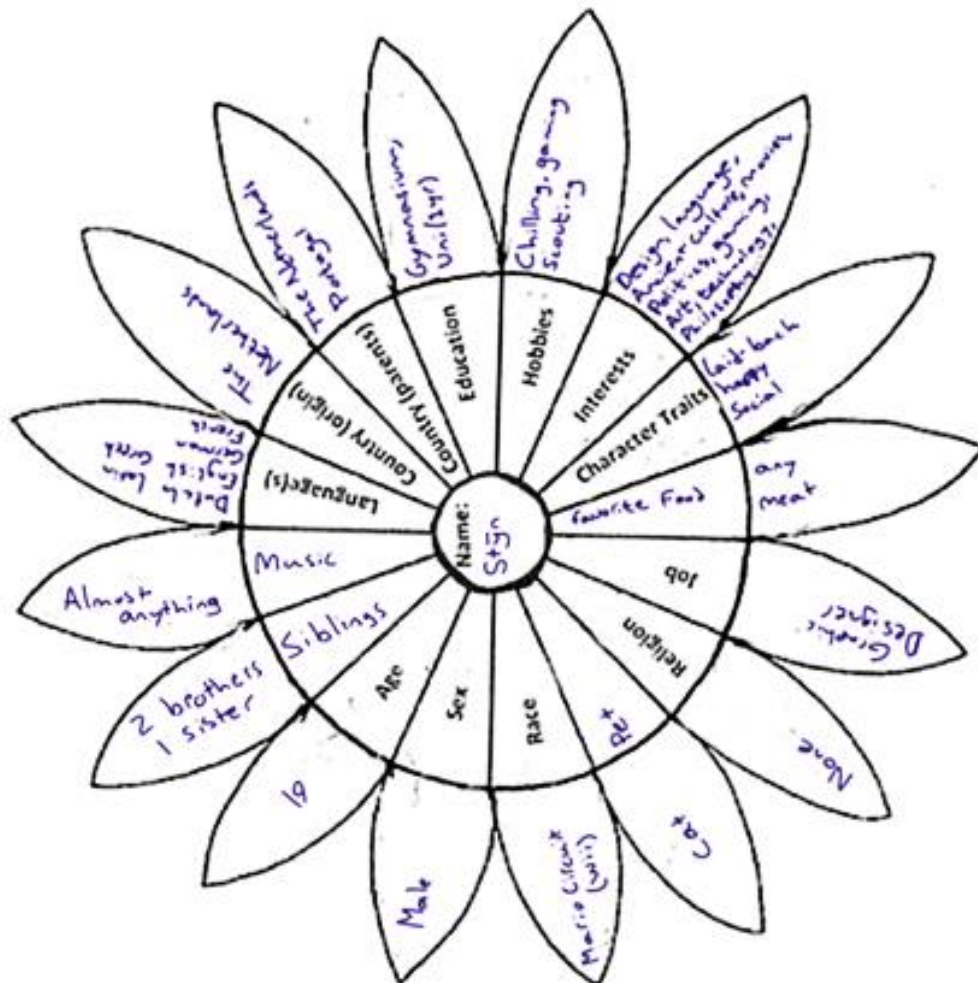
I have learned quite a lot about Germany and its Bundesländer the past weeks. I now know things mainly about Bayern, Hessen and Baden-Württemberg. It helped a lot to talk with Niclas and Daniel about this, because they live there. I also consulted my good friend Wikipedia every once in a while. I am still on my way to reaching my goal, mainly because I don't have a lot of time to read about German provinces, but I am making progress.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

My intercultural competence is quite alright. I've met many people from different cultures over the years, and learned to understand them, to not only look from my point of view but to also see theirs. At high school and university, I have learned about ancient cultures which are very different from my own. I think that has also helped me understand how different norms, values and habits can be. One thing I can improve is to travel outside of Europe, since I've never done that before. Therefore my actual experience is limited to cultures that somewhat resemble mine.

Attachment 1: DNA flower

Workshop 1: Handout DNA



Attachment 2: Context Scale

Workshop 2: Handout Low- and High-Context Communication Scale

Self-Assessment 2.2

Low- and High-Context Communication Scale

Directions: Below are 32 statements regarding how you feel about communicating in different ways. In the blank to the left of each item, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement. If you are unsure or think that an item does not apply to you, enter a 5 in the blank.

Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Strongly Agree
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- 8 1. I catch on to what others mean, even when they do not say it directly.
- 6 2. I show respect to superiors, even if I dislike them.
- 5 3. I use my feelings to determine whether to trust another person.
- 7 4. I find silence awkward in conversation.
- 2 5. I communicate in an indirect fashion.
- 8 6. I use many colorful words when I talk.
- 9 7. In argument, I insist on very precise definitions.
- 2 8. I avoid clear-cut expressions of feelings when I communicate with others.
- 7 9. I am good at figuring out what others think of me.
- 3 10. My verbal and nonverbal speech tends to be very dramatic.
- 8 11. I listen attentively, even when others are talking in an uninteresting manner.
- 8 12. I maintain harmony in my communication with others.
- 7 13. Feelings are a valuable source of information.
- 1 14. When pressed for an opinion, I respond with an ambiguous statement/position.
- 8 15. I try to adjust myself to the feelings of the person with whom I am communicating.
- 2 16. I actively use a lot of facial expressions when I talk.
- 5 17. My feelings tell me how to act in a given situation.
- 7 18. I am able to distinguish between a sincere invitation and one intended as a gesture of politeness.
- 87 19. I believe that exaggerating stories makes conversation fun.
- 670 20. I orient people through my emotions.
- 7 21. I find myself initiating conversations with strangers while waiting in line.
- 56 22. As a rule, I openly express my feelings and emotions.

- 8 23. I feel uncomfortable and awkward in social situations where everybody else is talking except me.
- 6 24. I readily reveal personal things about myself.
- 9 25. I like to be accurate when I communicate.
- 6 26. I can read another person "like a book."
- 2 27. I use silence to avoid upsetting others when I communicate.
- 6 28. I openly show my disagreement with others.
- 9 29. I am a very precise communicator.
- 6 30. I can sit with another person, not say anything, and still be comfortable.
- 5 31. I think that untalkative people are boring.
- 7 32. I am an extremely open communicator.

Scoring: Reverse your score for Items 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 31, and 32. If your original score was 1, reverse it to a 9; if your original score was a 2, reverse it to an 8; and so on. After reversing the score for those 15 items, simply sum the 32 items. Lower scores indicate low-context communication. Higher scores indicate high-context communication.

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Feedback

- divide them into subchapters
 - biography
 - communication style
- start with little introduction to each chapter
 - maybe a little conclusion
 - for big part (bio...) + comm style
- punctuation and voc → see Appendix
- write table of contents
- Chapter 5:
 - Power Distance
 - Indulgence
 - ? ? (- Individualism)
 - ? ? (- Masculinity)
 - ? ? (- uncertainty avoidance)
 - ? ? (- Long Term orientation)
- Cover ?
- Title page ?