

IEREST

Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers

Module 1 - Introduction¹

The activities collected in this first module aim to help students reflect on issues for which they should be prepared before their stay abroad. They are titled:

1. Perceptions of self and other;
2. Anti-discrimination study circle;
3. Exploring narrative in intercultural mobility contexts;
4. Meeting others abroad.

The overarching aim of the module is to introduce the students to the concepts of non-essentialism and of multiple identities, and to the ideas that people are different but also similar across and within national boundaries, and that people construct both who they are and how they see other people. As such, the activities help students become aware that when they meet a person, they do not meet a 'culture' or a 'country' but a multifaceted individual who, like them, negotiates who they want to be and how they see/define/make sense of their interlocutors. The activities also stimulate the students to go beyond the idea of a single identity and to consider the fact that, when people meet each other, aspects such as gender, age, social class, language, etc. work hand in hand to create impressions of each other. These understandings will be crucial for students when abroad, as they will prepare them to look beyond the fixed labels people give each other.

These issues are at the core of Perceptions of self and other, which invites students to explore the concept of 'multiple identities' as well as to become familiar with terms such as 'co-constructed', 'negotiated', 'ascribed', and 'contested' identities. It is in the light of these concepts that other more common notions are reconsidered, namely those of 'stereotype', 'prejudice', 'essentialism', and 'ethnocentrism'. The activity also encourages students to reflect on their intercultural learning objectives during their study abroad, (re)frame their expectations and set realistic goals for study abroad in relation to their intercultural encounters. Methodologically, it starts with a video apparently unrelated to student mobility and then moves to offer an insight - by means of an extract from a real student report and a role-play - on how essentialism may be at work also in the context of study abroad in Europe.

¹ We would like to thank Fred Dervin for his contribution to this introduction.

Related to the idea of essentialism and multiple identities is the role of power. In particular Anti-discrimination study circle addresses this issue, by leading students to identify words, phrases and discourses that limit the opportunity for some people to enjoy multiplicity. This activity encourages students to reflect on discrimination and how it can touch upon everyone through implicit or explicit processes. In particular, some analytical tools derived from Discourse Analysis are introduced to students in order for them to identify the specific language choices through which discrimination is created and perpetuated by the media (TV news and the Internet). Finally, students are asked to apply the newly acquired analytical skills to a series of rent advertisements which discriminate several groups of people, including Erasmus students.

Exploring narrative in intercultural mobility contexts helps students understand how people (including former Erasmus students) tell their own and others' experiences and stories. In order to do this, it provides students with examples of narratives to encourage them to distinguish between two types of storytelling: on the one hand, 'essentialising' narratives which reduce their subject to a 'single story' and, on the other hand, complex narratives which are more subjective, participatory and open-ended. Chimamanda Adichie's TED talk *The danger of a single story* represents the starting point for students to engage in an analysis of narratives, including those of their own and other communities.

A non-essentialist perspective is also central in Meeting others abroad. Before moving abroad, it is common for students to explore sources of information (host university websites, travel books, videos produced by former Erasmus students) and take what is shown as fact. Here, students are invited to critically appraise how host institutions and former Erasmus students present images and tell stories about their own communities or the places visited with specific aims in mind. However, this activity also encourage students to reflect on how, when speaking with others, the interlocutor's questions can elicit the story-teller's essentialist view of self, other, and certain places. Students are thus asked to prepare and conduct interviews with Erasmus students from potentially non-essentialist perspectives.

Overall, the first module pursues the following learning objectives and aims at producing the corresponding learning outcomes. Within the single activities, only the relevant objectives and outcomes are reported.

	Learning objectives	Learning outcomes
1	Reflect on each person's uniqueness but also similarities, and on the fact that difference is not necessarily negative and that sameness is not necessarily positive	Recognise and explain the variety and complexity that exist among individuals in social groups.

	either.	
2	Understand how different types of identities (gender, age, racial, ethnic, national, geographical, historical, linguistic, etc.) impact on communication with others.	Be able to explain ways in which different types of identities (gender, age, racial, ethnic, national, geographical, historical, linguistic, etc.) impact on communication with others.
3	Become aware of the ways in which people (re)construct and/or (re)negotiate their own and others' multiple identities depending on experiences, encounters, contexts, and interlocutors.	Describe ways in which people (re)construct and/or (re)negotiate their own and others' multiple identities depending on experiences, encounters, contexts, and interlocutors.
4	Consider the problematic nature of using certain terms (e.g. ethnicity, race, nation) to frame identity.	Recognise and explain the problematic nature of using certain terms (e.g. ethnicity, race, nation) to frame identity.
5	Explore the role of power in dominant discourses (media, political, institutional) and reflect on how these discourses lead to perceiving people from other backgrounds in certain ways.	Recognise how their subjective worldview may be influenced by dominant discourses (media, political, institutional); and how their worldview influences their perceptions of themselves and (their interactions with) others.
6	Understand that what people say about their culture may be interpreted as what they wish others to see about themselves, and which may not be applicable to others from that culture or group.	Interpret what people say about their culture as a personal observation, and possibly as evidence of what they wish others to see about themselves.
7	Understand how key concepts such as stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising, and prejudice can lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of people from other horizons.	Recognise when misunderstandings may be the result of stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising and prejudice.
8	Reflect on some of the myths about study abroad and interculturality (interaction, language learning, identity, culture, etc.) in order to (re)frame expectations about	Set realistic objectives in relation to intercultural encounters, including language and communication expectations, for their stay abroad.

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