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**Intercultural Competence for Professional Experience**

The purpose of this resource is to:

* highlight the importance of intercultural competence for educators; and
* provide some strategies that could be used to develop this skill.

**Why is intercultural competence important for educators?**

* The educational setting is increasingly becoming very diverse.
  + This diversity can encompass cultural factors such as ethnicity, gender, language, ability and special needs (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011).
  + Children/young people may sometimes be treated differently because of how educators perceive these differences.
* It is important that pre-service educators confront their own prejudices from the start so that they understand the perceptions and beliefs that underpin their decision-making.
* Learning, educational settings and education are constructed differently by different cultural groups in the community (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011).
  + Understanding these differences will enable the pre- service educators to create and provide positive experiences for every child/young person in the educational setting and for themselves.

**What is intercultural competence?**

The components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills and attitudes complemented by the values one holds because of one’s belonging to a number of social groups; values which are part of one’s belonging to a given society (Byram, Nichols, Stevens 2001, p. 5).

**Knowledge**: knowing how one’s own and other social groups and social identities function.

* This information will be useful when dealing with someone from another culture.
* Misunderstandings can be resolved if pre-service educators have knowledge about social groups, their own practices, those of the host culture and general societal practices and individual interaction (Byram, Nichols, Stevens 200, p. 5).

**Skills**: ability to compare, relate and interpret documents or events from another culture and relate it to one’s own culture. Pre-service educators need to:

* find out about the educational setting’s community beliefs, values and behaviours;
* adapt to the culture of the educational setting;
* identify how your own schooling experiences differs from those of the context you are undertaking your professional experience; and
* be open about other people’s beliefs, values and behaviours.

(Byram, Nichols, Stevens 2001. P. 6)

**Attitudes**: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own. Pre-service educators should:

* re-examine their own values, beliefs and behaviours and be aware that they may not necessarily be the only correct ones; and
* look at things from the perspective of an outsider who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours.

(Byram, Nichols, Stevens 2001, p. 6)

**Strategies to develop intercultural competence**

* Learn about the culture of the context where you would be undertaking your professional experience.
* Be open to differences and be willing to adapt to the culture.
* Ask questions if you are unsure about how things are undertaken in that context.
* Familiarise yourself with the culture of the children/young people (songs they like, movies they watch, activities they do, books they read, etc.) you are working with.
* Introduce your own culture to the context and explain the similarities and differences.
  + This will help the children/young people and the school community understand why you do things the way you do.
  + It will also help the educational setting’s community build a rapport with you.
* Engage with the school community.
  + Make the first move and engage with the different stakeholders.
  + Show that you care about what is taking place in the context.
  + Do not isolate yourself from the discussions that take place in the staff room, etc.
  + Offer to help with setting’s activities (during or after hours).
  + Be proactive and demonstrate that you are willing to learn.

**References**Byram, M, Nichols, A & Stevens, D 2001, ‘Introduction”, in M Byram, A Nichols & D Stevens (eds), *Languages for intercultural communication and education 1: developing intercultural competence in practice*, Multilingual Matters, England.

Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, R & Le Cornu, R 2011, *Teaching challenges and dilemmas*, 4th edn, Cengage Learning, Australia.