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Resources for Interculturality in Chinese Higher Education (RICH-Ed)

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D2.3 LEARNING TOOLS MODULE 2

Intercultural Listening Through Story Circles

Resources for interculturality in Chinese higher education

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Introduction

This module aims to develop your intercultural listening skills using the methodology of story circles. In this module you will be listening to the experiences of others in small groups and learn to acknowledge that people's lives are shaped by different experiences and values, which people carry with them in society, as they grow, and as they engage with others. Through story circles this module aims to: (1) develop listening for understanding; (2) enhance your deep and empathetic listening skills; and (3) practise in multiple perspective taking.

Activity overview

Activity	Brief description of procedures
Activity 1 Introduction to Online Story Circles	In this Activity, you are introduced to the aims and objectives of this module. You will do an introductory Activity in small online groups to prepare for activities 2 and 3. You will think about what values are important to you, how you acquired or developed these values, and who has been important in shaping these values.
Activity 2 Listening to the Stories of Others	In this Activity, you will engage in the Story Circle. You will tell your stories to each other, and practise empathy and listening for understanding.
Activity 3 What Have I Learned About Others; About Myself?	After the Story Circle there is a debriefing. You will discuss, first in small break-out rooms and later with all students together in plenary, what you have learned from this exercise, both about the others, as well as yourself.
Activity 4 Empathetic Listening for the Future	In this Activity you will reflect on what you have learned from activities 2 and 3. You will look back on the stories that were told, how students in your group retold those stories, what you thought at the time, and how that thinking developed over time. Secondly, you will use the results of your personal Cultural Backpack that asks what identity markers (or cultural attributes) influence your personality, conduct and communication. You will consider how these markers influenced the way you told your story, and how you perceived the story of others.

Learning objectives and outcomes

This module contributes to the following learning objectives and outcomes from the Pedagogic Framework.

Learning objectives	Learning outcomes
Learners...	Learners are able to...

1	become aware of how people construct perceptions of the self and other.	critically reflect (in speaking or writing) on how their background influences the perceptions of self and other.
2	understand that identities are multiple (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, geographical, historical, linguistic, etc.) and that they are changing, contextual and negotiated.	describe how people shape their own and others' identities depending on experiences, encounters, contexts, and interlocutors.
3	become aware of the problematic nature of framing identity, both in interaction and in dominant discourses (e.g., in media, politics, institutions, family life).	recognise identity constructions (e.g., categorisation, stereotypes, essentialising) and understand how these can obstruct intercultural communication.
5	explore different concepts of culture (e.g., small and large cultures) and how these concepts can impact intercultural communication.	reflect on intercultural encounters, identify successful aspects, and learn from less successful aspects.
6	reflect on similarities and differences in intercultural encounters, and recognise the importance of shared understanding, even when differences remain.	identify similarities and differences, build shared understanding, gain new perspectives, and build new frames of reference.
7	develop listening and critical thinking skills by listening and responding to others' communication.	demonstrate deep listening by critically reflecting on and responding to what others have said.

Preparatory exercise

You will do this Activity before your first class. You will need the answers to the questions in group discussions of the first Activity.

1. List 10 to 20 groups that you are or were once part of. (Each group is a collective with some form of shared culture; there are as many cultures as there are collectives.) Examples can be small cultures/collectives such as: a student representative board, music group, hiking group, sports club, a family, and so on.
2. Fill out the table and define your Cultural Backpack.

My Cultural Backpack

Your cultural background: Which cultures have shaped you into who you are today?	
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Your Cultural Backpack: Which values and which views have these cultures instilled in you / planted inside you (from your childhood to today)?	
Which elements of your Cultural Backpack are still an important part of you today?	
Which elements of your Cultural Backpack have you thrown overboard in the course of time?	
What is the impact of your Cultural Backpack on how you are living your life today?	

Activity 1: Introduction to Online Story Circles

In this Activity, you are introduced to the aims and objectives of this module. You will do an introductory Activity in small online groups to prepare for activities 2 and 3. You will think about what values are important to you, how you acquired or developed these values, and who has been important in shaping these values.

1. The Cultural Backpack
 - Thinking about your Cultural Backpack, which cultures have shaped you into who you are today?

2. Now further complete your backpack, answering the questions below
 - In what kind of family did you grow up? What values do your parents live by? What was your upbringing like (strict, flexible)? How, in your family, did you perceive 'difference'? In what kind of place did you grow up (in a city/village)? What kind of groups do you belong to (friends/hobbies/sports clubs)? What did you learn there? Can you recall a moment in your life that influenced you strongly?
 - Which values and which views did these small cultures instil on you, or planted inside you (from your childhood to today)?
 - What have you brought with you from your past? What do you still find important?
 - What did you ban from your life? What values from your past, from your upbringing do you find unimportant now? Which elements of your Cultural Backpack have you thrown overboard in the course of time?

3. Now share your backpack with fellow students in small groups, discussing the following questions:
 - Share the contents of your Cultural Backpack to each other.
 - Notice what is similar, what is different.
 - What strikes you about the backpack of others, or your own backpack in relation to the others'?

4. Present the main findings in plenary, to the rest of your classroom.

Homework

Please read the below guidelines in preparation for Activity 2. For the Story Circle to be successful, as participant you should:

- affirm the equality of all in the circles;
- ensure that the breakout rooms are a safe space (physically, mentally, emotionally);
- uphold respect and openness toward all participants;
- adhere to confidentiality in what is shared;
- be willing to be involved in the Story Circle process;
- be interested in developing intercultural competencies and understand that this is the purpose of the Story Circles experience;
- there is a commonly shared language in which to communicate (English or Chinese);
- enforce appropriateness for the societal and cultural expectations of the context.

Activity 2: Listening to the Stories of Others

In this Activity, you will engage in the Story Circle. You will tell your stories to each other, and practise empathy and listening for understanding.

1. Warming-up

- Go to the voting website (www.menti.com), enter the code for your presentation and answer the question that is posed there: *Think of someone you know personally, or who is known to you, and who you feel connects well with others who are different from you.*
- Write one or two words that describe this person and what about this person makes him or her so successful in connecting with others.
- Discuss the results with your class.

2. Story Circles guidelines

- You will be divided into smaller groups.
- In your group, please remember the guidelines that you read as homework for this Activity.
- Timekeeping is crucial and each participant should have the same amount of allotted time. Please assign one person for each story as timekeeper and decide in advance what signal you will use to indicate that there is no more time left.
- During the story circles you will not interrupt, comment, or ask questions while the other person is talking.

Round 1: Getting acquainted

- In **two minutes** or less, briefly introduce yourself to the group by answering the prompt which you prepared for this Activity.

Round 2: Intercultural competencies round

- Your teacher will now provide you with a second prompt.
- In **three minutes** or less, tell your group the answer to this question.

Round 3: "Flashback" time

- You will now engage in "flashback" time. All students will go back to their story of the first round.
- In **15 seconds** or less, each person (other than the storyteller) shares a specific memorable part of that other persons' story
- Go on to the second story, and so on, until "flashbacks" have been shared for all stories in your group.

Homework (optional)

In preparation for the next Activity, please prepare answers to the following three questions:

1. What was the most memorable thing you heard during the story circles?
2. What most surprised you?
3. What challenged you in the stories you heard?

Activity 3: What Have I Learned About Others; About Myself?

After the Story Circle there is a debriefing. You will discuss, first in small break-out rooms and later with all students together in plenary, what you have learned from this exercise, both about the others, as well as yourself.

1. Debriefing phase
 - Prepare with your group a one-page collage that represents the intercultural learning that occurred during the experience (in PowerPoint). For example, select one or more pictures (e.g., from the Internet) that represents the intercultural learning about yourself and about the others in the group.
 - Each group will present their presentation to the rest of the class.

Homework

In preparation for the next session, please write down your answers to the following questions:

1. How has the group discussion helped you gain further intercultural insights about improving our relationships, conduct, and communication with people who are different from us?
2. As a result of thinking about these questions, what positive contributions could you make in your community/in your context?

3. As a result of this experience, will you change anything in your future behaviour and how you interact or communicate with people different from you?

Activity 4: Empathetic Listening for the Future

In this Activity you will reflect on what you have learned from activities 2 and 3. You will look back on the stories that were told, how students in your group retold those stories, what you thought at the time, and how that thinking developed over time. Secondly, you will use the results of your personal Cultural Backpack that asks what identity markers (or cultural attributes) influence your personality, conduct and communication. You will consider how these markers influenced the way you told your story, and how you perceived the story of others.

1. Warming up

- Think back to the questions you answered in preparation to this Activity.
- Please share your answer to the following question with the whole group: "Stepping back from the experience itself, can you think of one or two insights you have gained that will help you relate better to those who are different from you?"

2. Group discussions

- Discuss the questions you prepared for this Activity in smaller groups and take notes of your discussion:
 - How has the group discussion helped you gain further intercultural insights about improving our relationships with people who are different from us?
 - As a result of thinking about these questions, what positive contributions could you make in your community/in your context?
 - As a result of this experience, will you change anything in your future behaviour and how you interact with people different from you?
- Look for differences and commonalities in your answers.
- Share your answers with the other groups.

Extension Activity (optional)

Please write a small reflective essay where you respond to some of the following questions:

- Thinking about your personal Cultural Backpack and the identity markers (or cultural attributes) you identified in Activity 1, how do you think these markers influence your personality, conduct and communication with others? How did they influence the way you told your story, and how you perceived the stories of others?
- What did you learn from participating in Story Circle activities? Please draw from the discussions about your Cultural Backpack (Activity 1), look back on the stories that were told, and how students in your group retold those stories (Activities 2 and 3).

Intercultural competence action plan

Think back to what you have learned from the Story Circle exercise and identify two or three intercultural elements (or competencies) that you would like to focus on more for yourself, for example:

- Demonstrate respect for others.
- Practice listening for understanding.
- Cultivate curiosity about similarities and differences with others.
- Gain increased cultural self-awareness.
- Develop empathy.
- Engage in critical reflection of one's own intercultural competencies development, as well as on the intercultural experience.
- Develop relationships with culturally different others.

What will you do to in the future, to further enhance, develop, and/or practise the above mentioned intercultural competences? How will you continue to engage in a positive manner with people who are different from you? And how will you actively try to change your perspective or behaviour? Examples of actions may include or be prompted by the following:

- build an authentic relationship with someone from a different background
- learn more about the background and/or Cultural Backpack of other people
- look for the invisible influence of background and/or culture in everything
- meet regularly with someone from a different background
- attend a community event intended primarily for a group other than my own
- actively reflect on my intercultural competence development
- regularly seek out people who are different from me
- read a book on intercultural communication
- take an intercultural course
- learn a new language

Develop an action plan in the grid below, using the examples provided. Please write down in the left column four competencies you want to focus on. Then in the subsequent columns name an activity that you can undertake to enhance this competence.

Action plan for developing my intercultural competencies				
Intercultural competence	In my family	In my friendship network	With fellow university students	In the community
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Self-Assessment

Complete the following self-assessment grid to reflect on what you have learned from this module, with reference to the learning outcomes of this module.

Learning outcome	I have learnt...	I still have to learn...
I am able to...	I have learnt it thanks to...	Because...
critically reflect (in speaking or writing) on how my background influences the perceptions of self and other.		
describe how people shape their own and others' identities depending on experiences, encounters, contexts, and interlocutors.		
recognise identity constructions (e.g., categorisation, stereotypes, essentialising) and understand how these can obstruct intercultural communication.		
reflect on intercultural encounters, identify successful aspects, and learn from less successful aspects.		
identify similarities and differences, build shared understanding, gain new perspectives, and build new frames of reference.		
demonstrate <u>deep listening</u> by critically reflecting on and responding to what others have said.		