



## What is Intercultural Competence?

### Discussion Guide

#### Discuss

1. Elsie provides a definition of intercultural competence as *“a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts.”*
  - a. How does your cultural background impact your attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in the workplace?
  - b. What challenges might we face as a result of cultural diversity in the workplace or classroom?
  - c. Conversely, what opportunities does cultural diversity present?
2. Elsie introduces the metaphor of the iceberg to think about cultural identity. We tend to notice those characteristics that are “above the waterline.” However, the core values of our culture are typically below the water line. Using the iceberg metaphor, describe how you culturally identify. What do we see—and what is less obvious?
3. How do you adapt your teaching to meet the different culture and learning styles of your students?
4. How do you adapt your interpersonal skills to meet the different culture and learning styles of your colleagues?
5. Can you recall a time when a person’s cultural background affected your approach to a work situation? Please explain.
6. Elsie states that training for intercultural competence is intended to move the individual from an ethnocentric view that denies, defends against, or minimizes difference, to an ethnorelative one that accepts, adapts, and integrates difference. One way to achieve an ethnorelative perspective is to build cultural knowledge. What efforts have you made or been involved with to foster cultural competence and understanding?
7. What are some specific things you are going to do over this next year to further your cultural competence?

## Practice

Here are some statements to explore your individual cultural competence. If you wish, use a scale of 1-5 (with 1 as agree and 5 as disagree) as a measure. Determine which of these points invite further development. What resources are available to assist with personal development around these points?

	1	2	3	4	5
I view human difference as positive and a cause for celebration.					
I have a clear sense of my own ethnic, cultural and racial identity.					
I am aware that in order to learn more about others I need to understand and be prepared to share my own culture.					
I am aware of my discomfort when I encounter differences in race, color, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity.					
I am aware of the assumptions that I hold about people of cultures different from my own.					
I am aware of my stereotypes as they arise and have developed personal strategies for reducing the harm they cause.					
I am aware of how my cultural perspective influences my judgment about what are “appropriate,” “normal,” or “superior” behaviors, values, and communication styles.					
I accept that in cross-cultural situations there can be uncertainty and that uncertainty can make me anxious. It can also mean that I do not respond quickly and take the time needed to get more information.					
I take any opportunity to put myself in a place where I can learn about differences and create relationships.					