



InterculturalATL

Developing Intercultural Competency
to more effectively work with diverse students

[Marinelly Piñango, PhD](#) and [Kris Acheson-Clair, PhD](#)
Representing the Atlanta Interculturalists

Overview

I. Introduction

II. What is culture?

III. What is Intercultural Competence?

IV. Mindfulness of self

V. Mindfulness of others

VI. Mindfulness of Self-Other Interactions

VII. Discussion

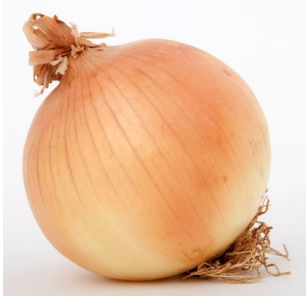




Introductions

What is Culture?

Some ways to think about culture



Broadening the ways we think about culture



People and cultures are complex

Values and behaviors are multi-layered



Broadening the ways we think about culture



Outsiders see the tip of the iceberg

The vast majority of culture is internalized, hidden beneath the water line



Broadening the ways we think about culture

“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are”



- Anaïs Nin

The blind men and the elephant fable



Broadening the ways we think about culture



Water is invisible to fish

The first step to
intercultural competency
is discovering our own
oceans



What is Intercultural Competence?

Intercultural Competence: Definitions

Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role.

(Michael Byram, 1997).

The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

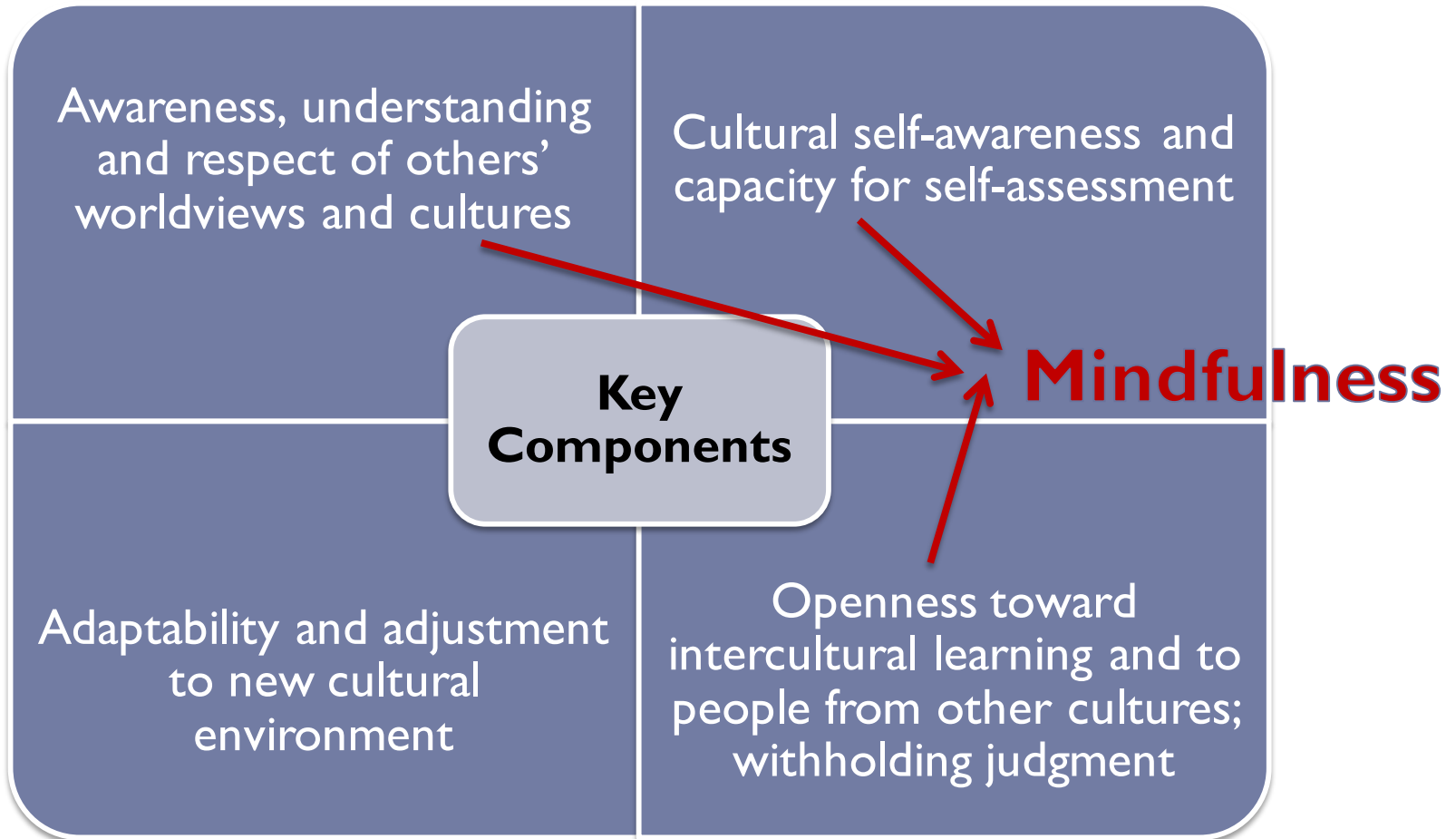
(Darla Deardorff, 2004)

The overall capacity of an individual to enact behaviors and activities that foster cooperative relationships with culturally (or ethnically) dissimilar others.

(Young Yun Kim, 2009)



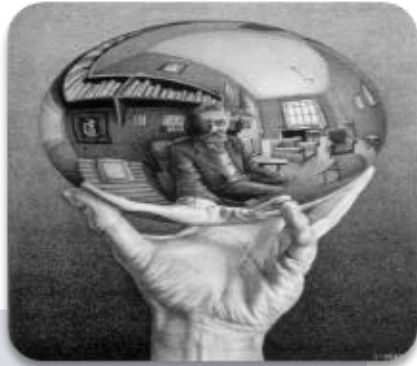
Intercultural Competence: Key components



Mindfulness of the Self

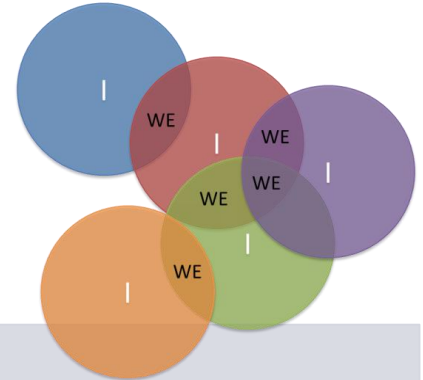
Identity and Self-Awareness

Identity



A person's conception and expression of their own (self-identity) and others' individuality or group affiliations (such as national identity and cultural identity)

Self-Awareness



The capacity for introspection and the ability to recognize oneself as an individual separate from the environment and other individuals.



Why cultural Self-Awareness?

- ▶ Focusing only on others emphasizes separation and difference
- ▶ Knowing ourselves helps us recognize our biases
- ▶ Highlights the relevance of culture in our own lives
- ▶ Helps us avoid assuming our values and behaviors are universal

How do our brains organize the world?



Being Mindful of our Schemas


What are Schemas?

- Organized patterns of thought that sort the information that we receive from the world into categories.

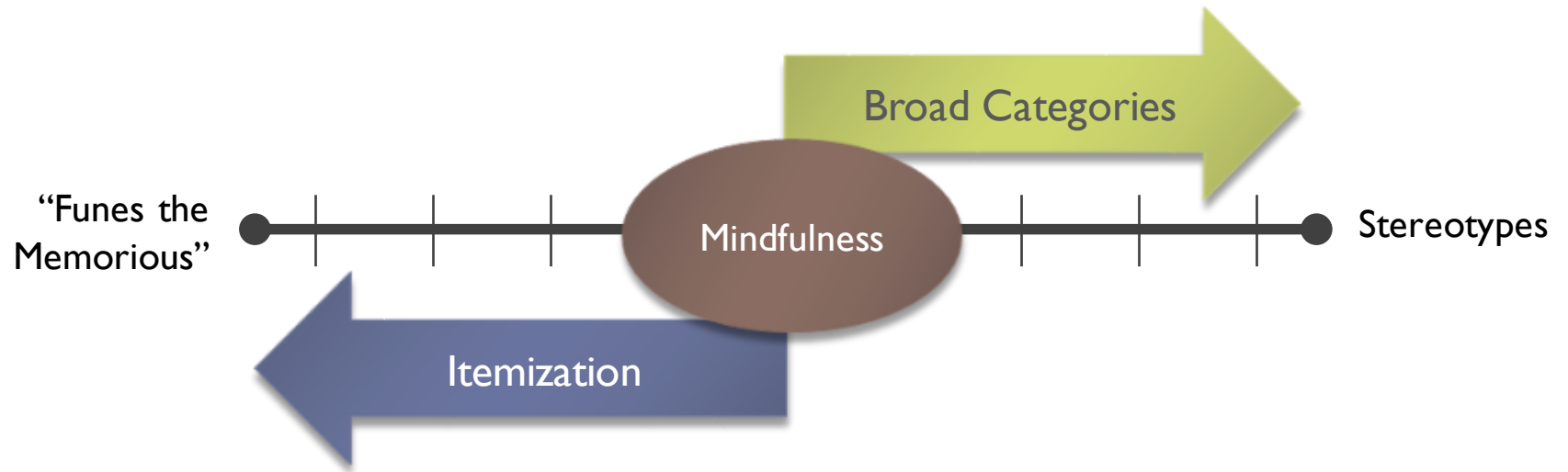
What are Schemas for?

- Processing information quickly and largely automatically.

How do Schemas work?

- When we encounter a new person or situation, we automatically and usually unconsciously place them into a cognitive category or schema. The schema itself is not inherently good or bad. It is simply a means of organizing the world around us.
-
- 

Mindfulness: Implies balance and consideration of context



Exercise: Mindfulness of Self





D.I.E.

Describe Interpret Evaluate

- ▶ Usually, all three processes happen at once, and below the level of awareness.
- ▶ BUT, when we are mindful, we can consciously separate them.
- ▶ This deliberate analysis helps us understand the impact of our schemas on how we experience the world around us.



Mindfulness of Others

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”

To Kill a Mockingbird, Atticus Finch to Scout



Mindfulness of others

- ▶ Our view of others (from the outside) tends to be oversimplified.
- ▶ Think back to our metaphors for culture:



Mindfulness of Others

- ▶ **Tips for increasing your mindfulness of others:**
 - ▶ Move beyond the two-dimensional – when others seem simple, dig deeper until you learn to see their complexity.
 - ▶ Have porous categories – even when you use stereotypes as a useful starting point, allow others to defy your preconceptions and move around within your schemas.
 - ▶ Learn how to learn about others – find tactful ways to gain cultural knowledge about unfamiliar groups.



Exercise: Mindfulness of Others





Hunza Valley, Pakistan
6 August 2015

“I’m studying overseas at a small college in Minnesota. I’m just home for the summer. There’s definitely more outward freedom in the states to wear what I want and do what I want. But I never feel completely at ease because there are only three Pakistanis at my school, and I feel that everything I do reflects on my family, my religion, and my country. I feel pressured to always be exceedingly polite and well behaved, even when I don’t feel like it. But in Pakistan I can relax more, even though the electricity sometimes goes out and I’ve already been mugged twice since I’ve been back. Because here I feel like my actions only reflect on me.”





Tehran, Iran
26 August 2015

“My mother died when I was two years old, so it’s just me and my father. He’s been really angry with me lately. He’s always wanted me to be an engineer like him, but I switched my major to photography. He didn’t show any emotion when I told him. He always has a poker face. But I know that he’s angry from the little things. He never asks me to go shopping with him anymore. We used to go to the market together. He’d pick up a watermelon, inspect it, then would hand it to me for my opinion. It doesn’t sound like much but I really valued that time together. But once I changed my major, he stopped asking me to come along. But I think things are getting better. Recently I scored in the top 5th percentile on the University Entrance Exam for photography. When I told my father, he didn’t show any emotion. But the next day he asked me if I wanted to go shopping. And that made me so happy. Because it’s just the two of us. And I really, really, really, really love him.”



Mindfulness of Self-Other Interactions

The Bigger Picture



- ▶ Mindfulness goes beyond awareness of various pieces of the puzzle (self and other), to how they fit together – or don't.
- ▶ We need to look at context, history, power, and relationships.
- ▶ Individuals who are interacting can be seen as representative of their cultures.
- ▶ Stereotypes go both ways (from the culture to the individual and vice versa).



Mindfulness and discrimination

- ▶ Some people try to eliminate discrimination by getting rid of categories.
- ▶ BUT we can't simply stop categorizing – it's how our brains work.
- ▶ Mindfulness suggests increasing, not reducing, categories (smaller groups, but more of them).
- ▶ Each group includes many different individuals and each individual belongs to multiple groups.
- ▶ Being mindful (being more discriminate, or recognizing fine distinctions) can thus reduce prejudice.



Exercise: Mindfulness of Self-Other Interactions



Mindfulness of Self-Other Interactions



Meet Matthew
and Mía

Matthew works in an office that serves international students like Mía. They see each other fairly often.



Mindfulness of Self-Other Interactions

Matthew



“Mía is always wasting my time with small talk. I’m very busy; I just want her to tell me what she needs so I can help her and move on to the next student.”

Mía



“I see Matthew often, but he never acts like he recognizes me. I just can’t understand why he won’t talk about anything personal, or at the very least acknowledge that he knows me.”



The Bigger Picture



- ▶ Who are the puzzle pieces (the self and other), as individuals and members of cultural groups?
- ▶ What is the context of this interaction?
- ▶ Are history or power important to consider here?
- ▶ Why is miscommunication likely, and how can it be avoided?



Some Inhibitors of Mindfulness

Precognitive commitment

- Deciding on a sole course of action very early in the deliberative process; viewing the situation through a familiar category and never exploring other possible interpretations or perspectives.

Overt dominance

- Talking over others; interrupting; refusing to listen to others; and nonverbal behaviors such as invading another's personal space.

Non-fact based reasoning

- Evaluating data only from an emotional perspective; remaining inflexible when presented with logical facts that support an opposing view or position.



Thank you! Questions?