

# The conceptual foundations of the Framework

## The concepts of “identity”, “culture”, “intercultural” and “intercultural dialogue”

The Framework is based on a number of concepts, including “identity”, “culture”, “intercultural” and “intercultural dialogue”, and each of these is discussed and defined for use in the Framework.

The term “identity” denotes a person’s sense of who they are and the self-descriptions to which they attribute significance and value. Most people use a range of different identities to describe themselves, including both personal and social identities. Personal identities are those identities that are based on personal attributes (e.g. caring, tolerant, extroverted), interpersonal relationships and roles (e.g. mother, friend, colleague) and autobiographical narratives (e.g. born to working-class parents, educated at a state school). Social identities are instead based on memberships of social groups (e.g. a nation, an ethnic group, a religious group, a gender group, an age or generational group, an occupational group, an educational institution, a hobby club, a sports team, a virtual social media group); cultural identities (the identities that people construct on the basis of their membership of cultural groups) are a particular type of social identity, and are central to the concerns of the Framework.

“Culture” is a difficult term to define, largely because cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous and embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often disputed, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways. That said, any given culture may be construed as having three main aspects: the material resources that are used by members of the group (e.g. tools, foods, clothing), the socially shared resources of the group (e.g. the language, religion, rules of social conduct), and the subjective resources that are used by individual group members (e.g. the values, attitudes, beliefs and practices which group members commonly use as a frame of reference for making sense of and relating to the world). The culture of the group is a composite formed from all three aspects – it consists of a network of material, social and subjective resources. The total set of resources is distributed across the entire group, but each individual member of the group appropriates and uses only a subset of the total set of cultural resources potentially available to them.

Defining “culture” in this way means that groups of any size can have their own distinctive cultures. This includes nations, ethnic groups, religious groups, cities, neighbourhoods, work organisations, occupational groups, sexual orientation groups, disability groups, generational groups, families and so on. For this reason, all people belong simultaneously to and identify with many different groups and their associated cultures.

There is usually considerable variability within cultural groups because the resources that are perceived to be associated with membership of the group are often resisted, challenged or rejected by different individuals and subgroups within it. In addition, even the boundaries of the group itself, and who is perceived to be within the group and who is perceived to be outside the group, may be disputed by different group members – cultural group boundaries are often very fuzzy.

This internal variability and contestation of cultures is, in part, a consequence of the fact that all people belong to multiple groups and their cultures but participate in different constellations of cultures, so that the ways in which they relate to any one culture depends, at least in part, on the points of view that are present in the other cultures in which they also participate. In other words, cultural affiliations intersect in such a way that each person occupies a unique cultural positioning. In addition, the meanings and feelings which people attach to particular cultures are personalised as a consequence of their own life histories, personal experiences and individual personalities.

Cultural affiliations are fluid and dynamic, with the subjective salience of social and cultural identities fluctuating as individuals move from one situation to another, with different affiliations – or different clusters of intersecting affiliations – being highlighted depending on the particular social context encountered. Fluctuations in the salience of cultural affiliations and identities are also linked to shifts in people’s interests, needs, goals and expectations as they move across situations and through time. Furthermore, all groups and their cultures are dynamic and change over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from the cultures of other groups. They also change over time because of their members’ internal contestation of the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group.

This underlying concept of culture described above was used to develop the Framework, and it has implications for the concept of “intercultural”. If we all participate in multiple cultures, but we each participate in a unique constellation of cultures, then every interpersonal situation is potentially an intercultural situation. Often, when we encounter other people, we respond to them as individuals who have a range of physical, social and psychological attributes that serve to distinguish and identify them as being unique. However, sometimes we respond to other people instead in terms of their cultural affiliations, and when this occurs we group them together with others who share those affiliations. There are several factors that prompt us to shift our frame of reference from the individual and the interpersonal to the intercultural. These include, inter alia, the presence of noticeable cultural emblems or practices that elicit or invoke the cultural category in the mind of the perceiver, the frequent use of cultural categories to think about other people so that these categories are more readily elicited and accessed when interacting with others, and the usefulness of a cultural category in helping to understand why another person is behaving in the way that they are.

Thus, intercultural situations arise when an individual perceives another person (or group of people) as being culturally different from themselves. When other people are perceived as members of a social group and its culture rather than as individuals, then the self is also usually categorised – and may present itself – as a cultural group member rather than in purely individual terms. Intercultural situations, identified in this way, may involve people from different countries, people from different regional, linguistic, ethnic or faith groups, or people who differ from each other because of their lifestyle, gender, age or generation, social class, education, occupation, level of religious observance, sexual orientation, and so on. From this perspective, “inter- cultural dialogue” may be defined as an open exchange of

views, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, between individuals or groups who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations from each other.

Intercultural dialogue fosters constructive engagement across perceived cultural divides, reduces intolerance, prejudice and stereotyping, enhances the cohesion of democratic societies and helps to resolve conflicts. That said, intercultural dialogue can be a difficult process. This is particularly the case when the participants perceive each other as representatives of cultures that have an adversarial relationship with one another (e.g. as a consequence of past or present armed conflict) or when a participant believes that their own cultural group has experienced significant harm (e.g. blatant discrimination, material exploitation or genocide) at the hands of another group to which they perceive their interlocutor as belonging. Under such circumstances, intercultural dialogue can be extremely difficult, requiring a high level of intercultural competence and very considerable emotional and social sensitivity, commitment, perseverance and courage.

To summarise, the Framework assumes that cultures are internally heterogeneous, contested, dynamic and constantly changing, and that individuals have complex affiliations to various cultures. The Framework also assumes that intercultural situations arise due to the perception that there are cultural differences between people. For this reason, the Framework competence model makes frequent reference to “people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself” (rather than, for example, to “people from other cultures”). Intercultural dialogue is construed as an open exchange of views between individuals or groups who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations from each other.

### **The concepts of “competence” and “clusters of competences”**

Another important concept underlying the Framework is that of competence. The term “competence” can be used in many ways, including, first, its casual everyday use as a synonym for “ability”, second, its more technical use within vocational education and training, and third, its use to denote the ability to meet complex demands within a given context. For the purposes of the Framework, the term “competence” is defined as the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context.

Democratic situations are one such type of context. Thus, “democratic competence” is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant psychological resources (namely values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding) in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities presented by democratic situations. Likewise, “intercultural competence” is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant psychological resources in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities presented by intercultural situations. In the case of citizens who live within culturally diverse democratic societies, intercultural competence is construed by the Framework as being an integral component of democratic competence.

It is important to note that democratic and intercultural situations occur not only in the physical world but also in the digital online world. In other words, democratic discussions and debates and intercultural encounters and interactions take place not only through face-to-face exchanges, traditional print and broadcast media, letters, petitions and so on, but also through computer-mediated communications, for example, through online social networks, forums, blogs, e-petitions and e-mails. For this reason, the Framework has relevance not only to education for democratic citizenship, human rights education and intercultural education but also to digital citizenship education.

The Framework construes competence as a dynamic process. This is because competence involves the selection, activation, organisation and co-ordination of relevant psychological resources which are then applied through behaviour in such a way that the individual adapts appropriately and effectively to a given situation. Appropriate and effective adaptation involves the constant self-monitoring of the results of behaviour and of the situation. It may also involve the modification of behaviour (perhaps using further psychological resources) to meet the shifting demands of the situation. In other words, a competent individual mobilises and deploys psycho- logical resources in a dynamic manner according to the situation.

In addition to this global and holistic use of the term “competence” (in the singular), the term “competences” (in the plural) is used in the Framework to refer to the specific psychological resources (the specific values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding) that are mobilised and deployed in the production of competent behaviour.

Hence, on the present account, “competence” as a holistic term consists of the selection, activation and organisation of “competences” and the application of these competences in a co-ordinated, adaptive and dynamic manner to concrete situations.

It should be noted that, according to the Framework, competences include not only skills, knowledge and understanding but also values and attitudes. Values and attitudes are regarded as essential for behaving appropriately and effectively in democratic and intercultural situations. Just like skills, knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes are psychological resources that can be activated, organised and applied through behaviour in order to respond appropriately and effectively in democratic and intercultural situations. As such, values and attitudes are also competences that can be drawn upon by individuals, in much the same way as skills, knowledge and understanding.

However, dispositions are excluded from the set of competences specified by the Framework. Dispositions are instead treated as being implicit in the definition of competence which underpins the entire Framework – that is, competence as the mobilisation and deployment of competences through behaviour. If competences are not mobilised and deployed (if there is no disposition to use them in behaviour), then an individual cannot be deemed to be competent. In other words, having the disposition to use one’s competences in behaviour is intrinsic to the very notion of competence – there is no competence without this disposition.

In real-life situations, competences are rarely mobilised and deployed individually. Instead, competent behaviour invariably involves the activation and application of an entire cluster of competences. Depending on the situation, and the specific demands, challenges and

opportunities which that situation presents, and also the specific needs and goals of the individual within that situation, different subsets of competences will need to be activated and deployed. Five examples of situations that require an entire cluster of competences to be mobilised and applied in a dynamic and adaptive manner are presented in Boxes 1 to 5 below.

#### Box 1: Interacting during an intercultural encounter

At a multicultural event, two people who have different ethnic backgrounds from each other find themselves standing together. They start to talk about their respective ethnic and religious practices. Their conversation initially requires them to adopt an attitude of openness towards each other. It may also require them to regulate their emotions in order to overcome any anxieties or insecurities that they might have about meeting and interacting with someone with a different cultural background. Once the dialogue commences, they also need to mobilise and deploy close listening skills and linguistic and communicative skills to ensure that miscommunications do not occur and that the contents of the conversation remain sensitive to the communicative needs and cultural norms of the other person. Empathy is also likely to be required, along with analytical thinking skills, to facilitate comprehension of the other person's point of view, especially if this is not immediately apparent from what they are saying. It may emerge during the course of the conversation that there are irreconcilable differences in points of view between them. If this is the case, then respect for difference and tolerance of ambiguity need to be deployed and the lack of a clear-cut resolution accepted.

#### Box 2: Taking a stand against hate speech

A citizen may choose to take a principled stand against hate speech that is being directed at refugees or migrants on the internet. Such a stand is likely to be initiated through the activation of human dignity as a fundamental value and to be sustained through the activation of an attitude of civic-mindedness and a sense of responsibility. To challenge the contents of the hate speech, analytical and critical thinking skills need to be applied. In addition, the formulation of an appropriate response requires knowledge of human rights as well as linguistic and communicative skills in order to ensure that the stand that is taken is expressed appropriately and is targeted effectively at its intended audience(s). In addition, knowledge and understanding of digital media need to be drawn upon to ensure that the response is posted in an appropriate manner and its impact maximised.

#### Box 3: Participating in political debate and supporting one's own political position

In order to function effectively in political debate and to argue in support of one's own political position, it is necessary to have good knowledge and understanding of the political issues that are being debated. In addition, one's communications need to be adapted to both the medium of expression (e.g. speech, writing) and the intended audience. In addition, one needs to have an understanding of freedom of expression and its limits, and, in cases where communications involve people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself, an understanding of cultural appropriateness. Political debate also requires the

ability to critique the views of others and to evaluate the arguments which they deploy during the course of the debate. Political debate, and supporting one's own political position, therefore requires all of the following competences: knowledge and critical understanding of politics, linguistic and communicative skills, knowledge and understanding of communication, knowledge and understanding of cultural norms, analytical and critical thinking skills and the ability to adapt one's arguments appropriately as the debate proceeds.

#### Box 4: Encountering propaganda advocating a violent extremist cause on the internet

In the course of surfing the internet, an individual may encounter propaganda that is attempting to convert its viewers to a violent extremist cause. Analytical and critical thinking skills need to be mobilised on encountering such content. These skills enable the individual not only to recognise the literal meaning of the content but also to perceive its propagandist nature, as well as the underlying motives and intent of those who have produced the material. By additionally mobilising knowledge and critical understanding of media, the individual will be able to recognise the way in which the images and messages in the propaganda have been deliberately selected and edited in such a way to try to achieve their intended effects on the viewer. Because the content proposes that the human rights of other people should be violated in pursuit of the extremist cause, the valuing of human dignity and human rights needs to be activated, together with the valuing of peaceful democratic solutions to social and political conflicts. In addition, if an attitude of civic-mindedness is activated, the individual will report the online content to the appropriate public authorities. Resilience and action in response to violent extremist propaganda is therefore achieved by mobilising and applying a large number of competences, including values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding.

#### Box 5: Post-conflict reconciliation

In the wake of a serious conflict between two groups, an individual who has suffered violence or injustice in the course of the conflict may nevertheless choose to seek reconciliation with individuals from the other group. The recognition that all human beings are of equal dignity and value irrespective of the particular groups to which they belong may act as a motivation for seeking reconciliation. Alternatively, the desire to seek reconciliation may be motivated by knowledge of the history of conflicts between groups, and through understanding that seeking and inflicting revenge or retaliation for past events only leads to yet more conflict and a cycle of violence, causing still further loss and grief. The ability to regulate one's own emotions, especially when there have been strong feelings about the adversary in the past, is vital. A person who has set himself / herself the goal of reconciliation needs to mobilise an attitude of openness towards the former adversary, and a willingness to learn about and possibly to meet with members of the other group. Empathic skills need to be mobilised, as do linguistic and communicative skills and listening skills if meetings do take place. These skills

are likely to lead to an understanding of how the members of the adversary group perceive the conflict. Empathy might also lead to an understanding that members of the adversary group have the same basic psychological needs for freedom from threat and security as the members of one's own group, and that the conflict has caused harmful and damaging consequences for both groups, as a result of which a sense of common suffering may be generated. Analytical and critical thinking skills also need to be deployed to evaluate how the conflict has been represented on both sides, with the negative images, stereotypes and propaganda that have served to sustain and perpetuate the conflict being identified and deconstructed. From the dedicated and determined application of this large cluster of competences, forgiveness, reconciliation and a sense of hope regarding future relations with the other group may eventually emerge.

The examples given in these five boxes show that, in all five cases, adaptive behaviour requires the mobilisation, orchestration and sensitive application of a large set of competences in a manner that is appropriate to the given situation. Furthermore, these competences range across and include values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding. This notion of competences being deployed dynamically in entire clusters, rather than individually, in order to meet the needs and opportunities of specific democratic and intercultural situations as they arise, has important implications for curriculum design and for the teaching and learning of the competences, as well as for their assessment.

In summary, democratically and intercultural competent behaviour is viewed by the Framework as arising from a dynamic and adaptive process in which an individual respond appropriately and effectively to the constantly shifting demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by democratic and intercultural situations. This is achieved through the flexible mobilisation, orchestration and deployment of varying clusters of psychological resources drawn selectively from the individual's full repertoire of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.