



Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into the Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting

Unit 2 – Critical Thinking

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Overview of Unit 2: Critical Thinking

In the first unit, we saw how culture shapes our lives in all areas: our perspectives, practices, and products. Cultural differences can run deep and touch upon sensitive beliefs. In order to successfully negotiate these differences, we need to use critical thinking. Thus this unit begins with a working definition of critical thinking.

Interculturality doesn't come into play only on long trips across continents. If you consider culture at the micro level, you will see that we encounter different cultures even within our own communities. After reading about micro-cultures, you will work through two activities to help you explore your own identity as a cultural being. Next, there is a video (or reading) about active listening, which presents techniques that help you listen to and understand others better. After that, you have the opportunity to discuss the unit's concepts and apply active listening techniques in our discussion board. The chapter ends with a self-assessment and a summary.

The activities are listed below, followed by approximate times for each activity. Timing will vary depending on your experience and interest in the topic.



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1. **Watch** a video or read about “What is Critical Thinking?” (30 minutes)
2. **Take** a quiz on “What is Critical Thinking?” (15 minutes)
3. **Watch** a video or read a text about “Micro-cultures” (20 minutes)
4. **Explore** your own identities through the “Identities Wheel” activity (20 minutes)
5. **Take** a quiz on the concepts of micro-cultures and multifaceted identities (20 minutes)
6. **Watch** a video or read about “Active Listening” (15 minutes)
7. **Take** a quiz on “Active Listening” (15 minutes)
8. **Participate** in the discussion forum (30 minutes – optional)
9. **Take** a self-evaluation survey (15 minutes)
10. **Read** the unit summary (10 minutes)

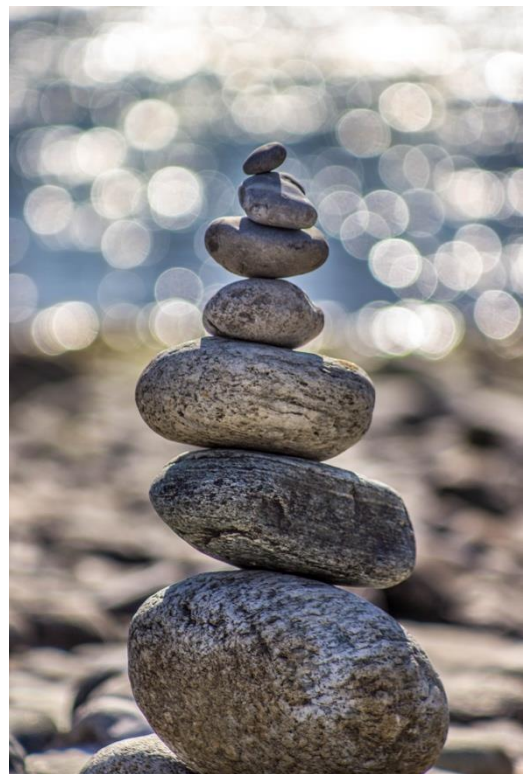
Unit 2: What is Critical Thinking?

[Video available online for viewing. Script below.]

As we have been discussing, culture influences every aspect of a person's life. Intercultural encounters can therefore be a site of conflict and misunderstanding in terms of emotional issues, stereotypes, and a difference in values. This does not necessarily need to be the case, however. Intercultural encounters can be very positive and can enrich the lives of all involved. Intercultural competence is needed to make intercultural encounters more likely to be positive. An essential part of intercultural competence is the ability to think critically. Critical thinking is necessary for understanding perspectives other than one's own and for effective problem solving. In this reading we will look more closely at what critical thinking is.

Since we have examined the difference between high-context of low-context cultures already through the Frank (2013) article, many examples in this reading will use this contrast to illustrate the main points.

1. **Critical thinking examines assumptions** (Epstein, 2003). Many of the assumptions that we have are based on our culture. For example, a person from a low-context culture may assume that it is always better to be direct when speaking. A person from a low-context culture needs to be critically aware of this assumption, especially when dealing with people from high-context cultures. We have many attitudes and assumptions that are deep culture elements and are very hard for us to see (Frank, 2013). Because of this, being aware of all of our assumptions is a difficult task that requires discipline and work.
2. **Critical thinking is thinking that is free (as free as possible) from bias and prejudice** (Haskins, 2006). Because different values are expressed in different ways, people from high-context cultures are likely to consider people from low context cultures too blunt. At the same time, people from low-context cultures are likely to consider people from high-context cultures too secretive. Critical thinking requires us to understand things in their context.
3. **Critical thinking distinguishes fact from opinion** (Debela & Fang, 2008). Because of different assumptions and different styles of communication, it is common for someone from one culture to think that people from another culture are rude. But this is just an opinion, not a fact. Very often the behavior that appears rude to one person is entirely appropriate behavior within certain cultural contexts.



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4. **Critical thinkers imagine and explore alternatives** (Brookfield, 1987). As we are seeing, it is necessary to understand other people's point of view to fully understand any situation. To understand someone's intentions, it is necessary to understand their perspective.
5. **Critical thinking is based on** certain "universal intellectual values" (Scriven & Paul, n.d.):
 - clarity:** We must think clearly.
 - accuracy:** We must not base our thinking on incorrect information.
 - consistency:** If we apply a rule to one context, we must apply that rule to all similar contexts.
 - depth:** Considering only surface information is not enough.
 - breadth:** We must consider a wide range of information.
 - fairness:** We need to be fair.All of these require careful thinking, time, and a reduction of bias.
6. **Critical thinking is a process** (Debela & Fang, 2008). From the points above, we can see that critical thinking takes time and effort. It is a process; it does not happen in an instant.
7. **Critical thinking can be learned, and critical thinking can be taught** (Debela & Fang, 2008). In part because critical thinking is a process, critical thinking is a skill that improves with practice. Critical thinking can be described and broken down into steps, and this is how critical thinking can be taught.

Specific techniques that are used to teach critical thinking include discussion, problem-based tasks, and the use of small groups (Brookfield, 1987; Debela & Fang, 2008). It is interesting to note that these teaching techniques are also frequently cited as particularly good ways of teaching foreign languages.

If you would like to read more about how to define and teach critical thinking, we encourage you to read Debela & Fang (2008) or any of the other references listed below.

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Suggested Further Reading

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Unit 2: What is Critical Thinking? – Follow-on Quiz

Meet Bob. Bob hasn't met very many people from cultures other than his own, and he hasn't had many educational opportunities that helped him improve his critical thinking. Poor Bob! (And poor us!)

In this quiz, you will read about a number of things Bob does. In each of them, he could be better at critical thinking. For each situation, choose the aspect of critical thinking that could most specifically help him to think more critically in that particular situation.

MODEL:

When Bob meets someone from his culture who is not polite, he thinks that individual person is not polite. When he meets someone from another culture who is not polite, he assumes that all people from that culture are impolite.

What aspect of critical thinking is Bob missing here?



["What is going on?"](#) by Alessandro Lucia via Flickr is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

- A) Critical thinking is based on clarity.
- B) Critical thinking is based on consistency.

Answer: B) is the better answer. The primary source of error in Bob's thinking here is inconsistency.

Remember, you must score at least 70% on each quiz in this MOOC in order to continue in the module. For this quiz, that means that you must score at least 7 out of 10 points. You may take the quiz as many times as you like. Be sure to read the feedback that you receive after each attempt. Your grade will be your highest score.

<<This diagnostic can only be completed online.>>

Unit 2: Micro-cultures

[Video available online for viewing. Script below.]

When we first think about cultures, we often think about countries – for example, Japanese culture, or US culture. These are large-scale cultures. There are also what are called **micro-cultures**. These are sub-cultures that exist within larger cultures. Neuliep defines micro-cultures in this way:

“An identifiable group of people who share a set of values, beliefs, and behaviors and who possess a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol system that is similar to but systematically varies from the larger, often dominant cultural milieu” (2015, p. xvi).

Let's break this definition down so that we can understand it better.

An **identifiable** group of people: If other people do not recognize them as a group, their culture may not be strong enough to really be a micro-culture.

...who share a set of **values, beliefs, and behaviors**: This fits perfectly with the 3P model of culture that we looked at in Module 1. Cultures are defined by their **perspectives, practices, and products**.

...who possess a **common history**: Having a common history is another requirement for an identifiable cultural group.

...who possess a common... **verbal system**: The verbal system is **language**. The members of the micro-culture speak the same language. Often this includes special terms that only people in the micro-culture use (slang or jargon). Sometimes this means that the micro-culture speaks a different language from the larger culture. An example of this would be the Spanish-speaking Latinos in the United States.

...who possess a common... **nonverbal symbol system**: The members of the micro-culture may use different **clothing** that helps identify them. They may have in common a special type of **art or music**. They may use different **gestures** when they are together.



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to

...that is **similar to, but systematically varies from**, the larger, often dominant cultural milieu: This means that the micro-culture has a lot in common with the larger culture, but they also have certain key differences.

If you start to think about it, you are a member of many micro-cultures. As your postings last week showed, your classroom is one micro-culture that you move through (and create) each day. Other micro-cultures in your life might have to do with your hobbies, family ties, profession, religion, or politics. We can see that there are many micro-cultures, and this is connected to the many different aspects of a person's identity. In the next two activities, we will explore both of these topics:

- the different aspects of our identities, and
- the different micro-cultures we participate in.

Reference

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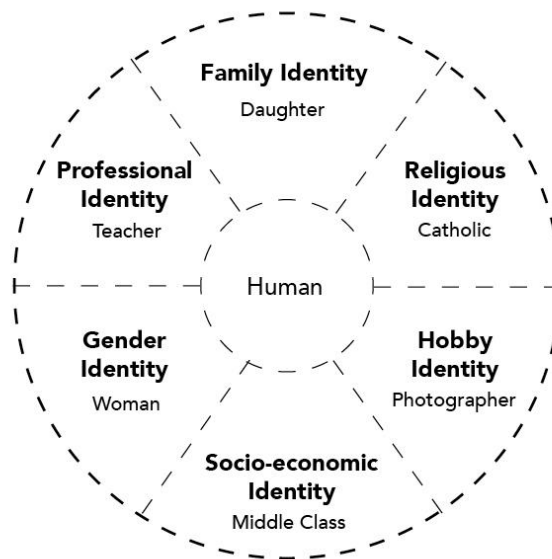
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Module 2: Identities Wheel

Everyone participates in multiple micro-cultures. Different aspects of our identity connect to the different micro-cultures that we are members of.

In this task, you will explore different aspects of your identity. The "Identities Wheel" is a visual tool to help you think about the different roles that you play and the various characteristics that you have, which define who you are. Look at this example wheel diagram.

Multiple Identities Within the Individual



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This is an example of what you will be creating in this task. The visual pie pieces are intended to help you consider the relative importance of each aspect. The elements in your "pie" or "wheel" will be

different from those in the example. You may have some or all of the same categories (family, religious, professional, etc.), and you may want to add or change some (for example, ethnicity, political identity, etc.).

Please take some minutes to create your own "Identities Wheel." You may choose to do it on a computer, or you may prefer to draw it by hand. You will not submit this document through Canvas. The next activity will follow up on this activity.

References

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Unit 2: Identities Activity



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This survey asks you questions about your experience creating your personal "Wheel of Multiple Identities" and then asks you to consider some different variations on the activity. Our objectives for this activity are for you to A) clarify your understanding of the different identities you have and the different micro-cultures that they correspond to, and B) think about ways you could use some of these ideas in the classes that you teach.

Answer the following 12 questions according to your own experience. There are no right or wrong answers; you are simply asked to answer the questions thoughtfully in order to move on in the MOOC. Because this quiz is not graded, it will not appear in the grade book.

<<This diagnostic can only be completed online.>>

Unit 2: Active Listening (and Active Reading)

Successful communication – whether in the classroom, during a private conversation, or during high-level diplomatic talks – requires all parties to listen to each other. The term “active listening” is used to describe a set of techniques we can use to make sure we are listening well. As you’ll see in the video, these techniques do not apply only to oral communication; active listening techniques are also powerful when applied to written forms of communication as well.

[Video available online for viewing. Script below.]

Have you heard of “active listening” before? The expression “active listening” is used in three main fields:

- Counseling and training
- Business
- Conflict resolution

In other words, situations where it is extremely important for the listener to fully hear what other speakers are saying. This is important for professional development as well. For us to really learn from each other and help each other develop professionally, we have to have quality exchanges. For me to respond meaningfully to what you say, I have to have really understood your message.

Traditionally, techniques for active listening have been developed for speaking contexts. However, most of them can be applied to our situation. That is, we can use active “listening” techniques even when we are communicating through written discussion boards. The purpose of using active listening in our discussion boards is to help others gain insight and to help ourselves practice giving feedback, offering suggestions, clarifying information, thinking critically and understanding.

These are essential skills for educators. We must strive to truly understand what someone is expressing, before responding. Below you will find some techniques you can use while reading and responding to discussion boards.

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” –
Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*.

Techniques

1. Use your full attention to read the posts.

When reading, make sure you are not distracted. This includes not listening to the radio, watching television, or having other conversations. Try to be fully present when you are reading. Clear your mind

and try not to think about other things. If you are having a difficult time concentrating, try reading out loud.

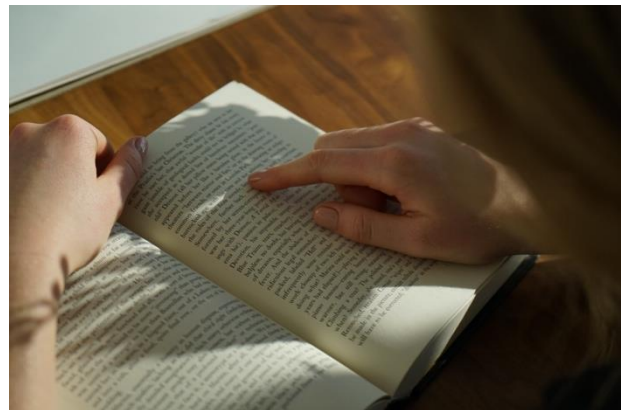
2. Reflect before responding.

Being an active listener requires self-awareness. Before you respond to what someone has written, reflect. Think about your immediate reactions. What judgments are you making? Are your reactions going to be helpful for the person you are responding to? Is it something that needs to be said? Will your response bring greater awareness to the person that posted? Before offering feedback, perhaps clarify the post.

3. Make sure you understood what the other person wrote.

Sometimes it is necessary to be careful how you express what you want to say. This may be because

- you are not sure if you have completely understood what the other person is saying, or
- you are worried that the other person may not be receptive to what you want to say.



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If it is necessary to **clarify** what the person has written, try asking questions. For example,

- “Are you saying that...?”
- “I’m not certain I understand. Do you mean...?”
- “Correct me if I’m wrong, but...”

Sometimes it is also appropriate to **restate** or **summarize** what you read in your own words. You can introduce your restating or summary of what the other person wrote with these expressions:

- “Let’s see if I’m clear about this. . .”
- “So it sounds to me as if . . .”
- “Let me see if I understand. You...”

If it seems like an emotional topic, you might want to try:

- “This is what I think I hear you saying...”
- “You appear to be feeling...”
- “Is there a chance that you...” or
- “It seems that you...”

4. Recognize the emotional side.

Sometimes instead of just repeating what the other person said (or wrote), it is helpful to recognize the emotional impact of what they are describing. Some phrases that are useful for this are,

- “This seems really important to you...”
- “You appear to be feeling...”
- “That sounds really frustrating (/exciting/ scary...)”

5. Offer alternatives.

Another way to understand someone is to **offer alternatives** to what they are saying. For example,

- “Is it possible that...?”
- “I wonder if...”
- “Would you agree with this idea...?”

You can use these phrases to check for understanding, take the other person’s ideas further, or perhaps to take them in a new direction. When you take their ideas further, you show them implications (meanings, outcomes) of what they are saying. These may be implications that they understand but did not say, or they may be implications that they have not thought about yet. When you suggest taking the other person’s ideas in a new direction, you offer an interpretation that is different from theirs.

6. Share your point of view, knowledge, or experience.

You can share information, observations, insights, and experiences. For example,

- “I have also experienced this, when...”
- “Your post reminded me of...”
- “I noticed that...”



7. Request more information.

Often when we ask for more information, we can get deeper and more meaningful information, and this can make the discussion more meaningful. Or you may just be curious about their experience and want to know more. In either case, some useful expressions to ask for more information are,

- “Can you tell me more about your experience?”
- “I am curious about your post, can you tell me more about...?”
- “What do you think would happen if you. . .?”

No matter what technique you use to respond, always remember to be respectful of the other person and be honest and open.

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Suggested Further Viewing

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Active Listening (and Active Reading) Presentation Slides

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ACTIVE LISTENING

And Active Reading



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ACTIVE LISTENING



- Counseling and Training
- Business
- Conflict Resolution
- Education

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“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” – Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*.

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TECHNIQUES

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1. USE YOUR FULL ATTENTION TO READ THE POSTS



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*Avoid distractions.
If you are having
difficulty concentrating,
try reading out loud.*

2. REFLECT BEFORE RESPONDING

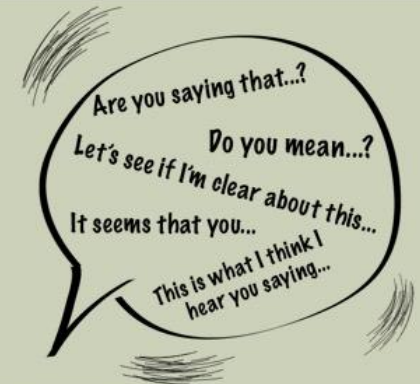
- What judgments are you making?
- Are your reflections going to be helpful for the person you are responding to?
- Is it something that needs to be said?
- Will your response bring greater awareness to the person that posted?



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3. MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTOOD WHAT THE OTHER PERSON WROTE

*If it is necessary to
clarify what the
person has written, try
asking questions.*



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RESTATE OR SUMMARIZE

- "Let's see if I'm clear about this. . ."
- "So it sounds to me as if . . ."
- "Let me see if I understand. You..."



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RESTATE OR SUMMARIZE

- "This is what I think I hear you saying..."
- "You appear to be feeling..."
- "Is there a chance that you..." or
- It seems that you..."



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4. RECOGNIZE THE EMOTIONAL SIDE

- "This seems really important to you..."
- "You appear to be feeling..."
- "That sounds really frustrating (/exciting/scary...)."



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5. OFFER ALTERNATIVES

- "Is it possible that...?"
- "I wonder if..."
- "Would you agree with this idea...?"



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6. SHARE YOUR POINT OF VIEW, KNOWLEDGE, OR EXPERIENCE



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- "I have also experienced this, when..."
- "Your post reminded me of..."
- "I noticed that..."

7. REQUEST MORE INFORMATION

- "Can you tell me more about your experience..."
- "I am curious about your post, can you tell me more about..."
- "What do you think would happen if you. . .?"



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No matter what technique you use to respond, always remember to be respectful of the other person and be honest and open.

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SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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Unit 2: Active Listening – Follow-on Quiz



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This quiz checks your comprehension of "Active Listening (and Active Reading)." You must score at least 70% on each quiz in this MOOC in order to continue in the module. For this quiz, that means that you must score at least 7 out of 10 points. You may take the quiz as many times as you like. Be sure to read the feedback that you receive after each attempt. Your grade will be your highest score.

<<This diagnostic can only be completed online.>>

Unit 2 Discussion: Moving through Cultures (optional)

In Unit 1, we explored what is meant by the term *culture*, and we looked at some ways in which values vary between cultures. In order to develop *intercultural competence*, a person needs to start from a position of understanding him- or herself as **a cultural being**. Only by being clear who you are and what culture(s) you belong to, can you understand how you relate to people from other cultures. The "Identities Wheel" activity was designed to help you think about these issues and to call attention to the fact that you move through multiple micro-cultures in your day-to-day life.



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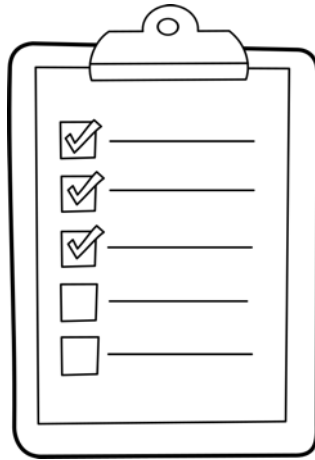
Please share with other participants in the course your experience of moving between the different micro-cultures to which you belong. When you write, address these questions:

1. First, in one or two sentences, describe two or three of the micro-cultures that you move between in your life.
2. Is there one micro-culture where you feel like you change aspects of yourself to fit in?
3. Is there one where you feel particularly at home?

Participants are encouraged to come back to the discussion and respond to at least one other participant. But answering the 3 questions above is your main task. When you respond to someone, write something substantive. If all you want to write is, "I agree with you," then using the "like" function is best.

<<This task can only be completed online.>>

Unit 2 Self-assessment



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You're almost finished with Unit 2. This is a good time for another check-in. As with last unit's self-assessment, you should answer all questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. This survey is not graded, but it is required in order for you to move on in the MOOC. There are 10 questions. You can only submit the self-assessment once.

<<This task can only be completed online.>>

Unit 2 Summary

Congratulations on making it to the end of Unit 2!

In this unit, we looked at several extremely familiar things in new ways:

Critical thinking. We think all the time, but critical thinking is a special type of thinking. It takes discipline and awareness, but it is a powerful tool for solving problems and resolving conflicts.

The cultures we participate in. In our daily lives we regularly cross between cultures, when you consider culture at the micro level.

Our identities. Each of the micro-cultures that we participate in corresponds to different aspects of our identities. By exploring the various roles that we play and the multiple (micro-)cultures that we participate in, we understand ourselves better as the cultural beings that we are. Understanding where we are coming from culturally helps us to understand and get along with people from other cultures.



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Listening. There are techniques that we can apply when we listen or read, which can help us capture and comprehend much more of what the other person is saying. This is a very helpful technique in many areas of one's life, including intercultural encounters.

In the next unit, we are going to take a sharp turn towards classroom applications. Up until now, we have been talking about culture and critical thinking in fairly general terms. Starting next unit, we will look at ways of applying these ideas in the lessons we teach.

<<This is the end of Unit 2.>>