

## Using Identity to Introduce ICC Skills in the EFL Classroom

by XIUQING WANG AND KELLY DONOVAN

**LEVEL:** Upper Intermediate or Advanced

**TIME REQUIRED:** 60 or 120 minutes

**GOALS:** Students will be able to do the following:

- discuss complex and multiple identities by creating an “identity wheel”
- through classroom discussion and reflection activities, demonstrate an understanding of how identity and culture are linked
- identify knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) used to navigate across cultural differences

**MATERIALS:** blackboard and colored chalk; paper and pencils or pens; prepared identity wheel to use as an example; PowerPoint, if available; printed tickets-out-the-door (optional)

**OVERVIEW:** Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) requires students to develop KSAs to improve cross-cultural communication. This lesson draws on students’ knowledge of their home culture as a point of comparison to other cultures. Specifically, students will work on developing an awareness of their own identities, which may affect how they interact with other cultures. This serves as one of the first steps in helping students

realize they use different communication strategies and skills based on their knowledge of (a) the context and (b) the people with whom they are interacting every day in their home culture. Students can use these same strategies and skills when communicating with someone from a different culture.

This article offers two options: a lesson of roughly 60 minutes, which focuses primarily on identities, and an extended, 120-minute option that integrates ICC and culture.

**BACKGROUND:** This lesson was originally taught in a Chinese university course called “Perspectives on Chinese Culture.” The classroom was homogenous, both in nationality and gender (all female students). While the course focused on ICC, this lesson helped students from the same home culture realize that they were culturally diverse when reflecting on their identities and the various cultures to which they belong.

These students have few opportunities to interact with native speakers of their target language (in this case, English). Reflecting on how they use KSAs to negotiate their identities has prepared them to use these elements of ICC when interacting with English speakers from other countries and cultures. The procedure can be modified, depending on how much background knowledge of ICC your students have.

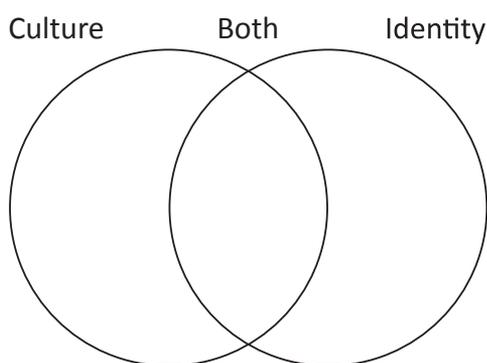
**PREPARATION:** Prepare an identity wheel (see Figure 3) to be shared with students during the lesson. Identity wheels can be drawn, or they can be generated at [meta-chart.com](http://meta-chart.com) (click on the PIE CHART image, then follow the steps: Design, Data, Labels, and Display).

**PROCEDURE:**

**1. Identity and Culture Schema**

**Activation** (15 minutes)

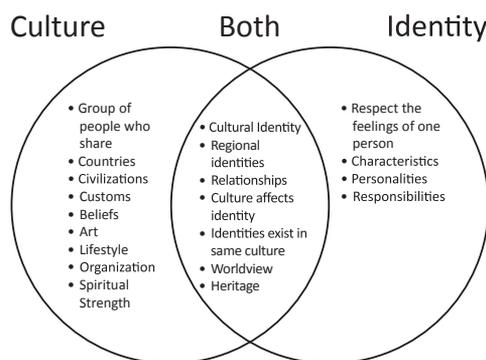
- a) Draw a giant Venn diagram on the board. Above the circle on the right, write *identity*. Above the circle on the left, write *culture*. In the center, above the overlap, write *both*. (See Figure 1.)



**Figure 1. Venn diagram of identity and culture**

- b) Ask students to draw the Venn diagram on their own papers and fill it in individually. You might give instructions like this: “We are going to look at two concepts today. You see two circles here on the board. One represents culture, and the other represents identity. In the middle, these two circles overlap because culture and identity might have some things in common. Please write down any examples of culture, or anything unique about culture, in the left circle, any examples of or anything unique about identity in the right circle, and anything they have in common or share in the middle section. You have five minutes.”

- c) As students near completion of their Venn diagrams, pass out chalk and ask students to write one of their examples in the appropriate space on the diagram on the board. Students should pass the chalk to another student before returning to their seats. Allow time for as many students to participate as possible. (See Figure 2 for a diagram completed by students during the summer of 2020.)



**Figure 2. Sample of student work exploring the concepts of culture and identity**

- d) Ask questions based on the students’ examples. Questions could be as follows:
- “How are culture and identity different from each other?”
  - “What aspects are similar between the two concepts?”
  - “Do you disagree with any of the items on the diagram? Why?”
- e) Work together as a class to write a definition of *identity* and a definition of *culture*. Record the definitions in student journals and/or on a PowerPoint slide to return to later.
- f) As a transition to the main lesson, give students an overview by saying, “Today we will look at both of these concepts in depth. At the end of class, we will see if we still think

these definitions are appropriate. First, let's look at identity."

the same aspects as I used? Would you need more? Fewer?"

## 2. Introducing and Modeling Identity Wheels (5 minutes)

- a) Display your identity wheel (see Figure 3 for an example). It should model a variety of aspects, such as gender, profession, nationality, ethnicity, hobbies, and so on. The aspects may vary, depending on the context and on what you are comfortable sharing with students.
- b) As students view your identity wheel, ask guiding questions:
  - "Which aspects of my identity are most important to me? How can you tell?"
  - "How many aspects of my identity are represented? Am I missing anything that you know of?"
  - "If you were to draw your own identity wheel, would you need

## 3. Creating Identity Wheels (10 minutes)

- a) Give each student a piece of construction paper. Tell students to draw a circle as big as possible on the paper.
- b) Ask students to use your identity wheel as a model to decide on the aspects they want to include about themselves. Then have students fill in their own identity wheels with as much detail as they can.
- c) Walk around the class to help.

## 4. Inner and Outer Circles: Sharing Identity Wheels (18–25 minutes)

Students will see several of their peers' identity wheels and have conversations about their identities. In six rounds, they will rotate partners through inside and outside circles.

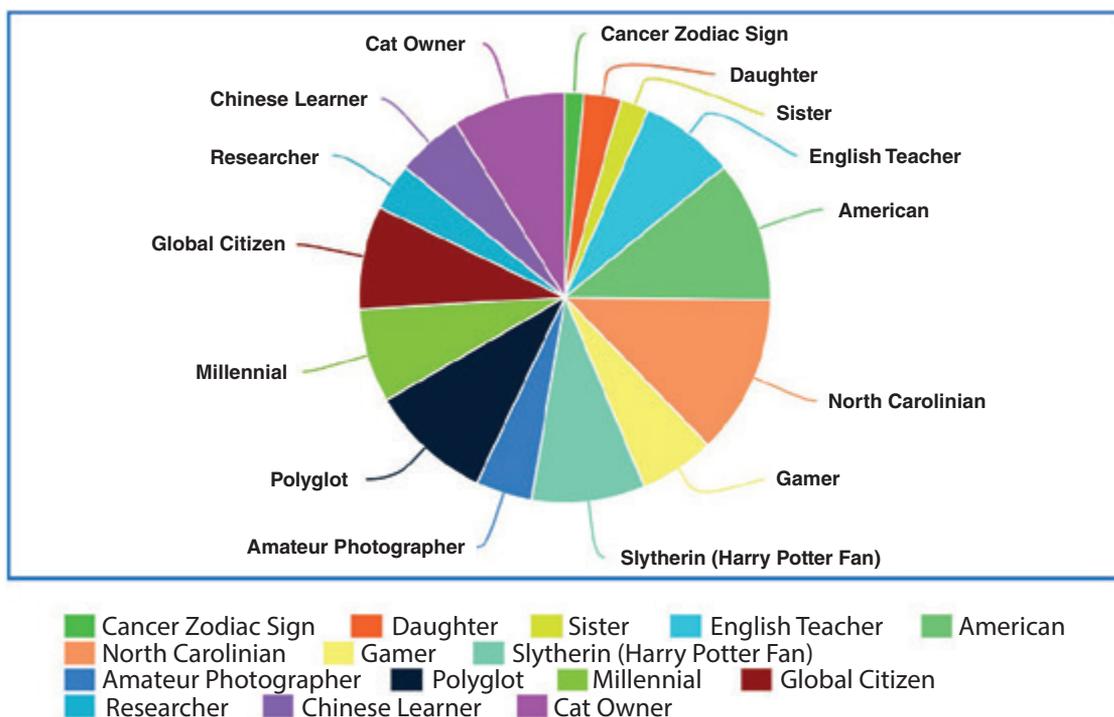


Figure 3. Example of an identity wheel

- a) Divide the class into two groups. One group will be the inside circle, facing outward. The other group will be the outside circle, facing inward.
- b) One student in the inside circle should be facing a student in the outside circle (paired together).
- c) Students will hold their identity wheels, from Step 3, in front of them so that their partner can see and read it clearly.
- d) Give these instructions to students for Rounds 1 to 3:
1. “Look at your partner’s identity wheel. You have one minute to read it *silently*. Do not discuss. One minute starts now. Go.”
  2. “One minute is up. Inner circle, do not move. Outer circle, please move one spot to your left to stand in front of the next person. Does everybody have a new partner? You have one minute to silently read the new identity wheel. Ready? Go.”
  3. “One minute is up. Last time now. Inner circle, do not move. Outer circle, please move one spot to your left again. Everybody read the new identity wheel silently. One minute. Go.”
  4. “Okay, one minute is up. Now, let’s look at the screen.”
- e) Display the following questions (on a PowerPoint slide or the board):
- *Which aspects and roles are most prevalent among your classmates?*
  - *What surprises you when you look at each other’s wheels?*
- f) Give these instructions to students for Rounds 4 to 6:
1. “We are going to do three more rounds. This time, you will have three minutes to discuss the questions on the screen [or on the board] with your partner. Can someone read the questions out loud for us? Thank you.”
  2. “When I say ‘Go,’ the outer circle will move to the left again. Share your identity wheels with each other and discuss the questions. How long will you have? That’s right: three minutes. Ready? Go.”
  3. “Time’s up. Outer circle, please move to the left. Remember to discuss the questions on the screen. Ready? Go.”
  4. “Time to stop. One more time now. Outer circle, please move to the left. Ready? Go.”
  5. “Time’s up. Great job! Thank you, everybody. Please return to your seats.”
- *Are there any shared aspects of your identities? Is anything different?*

*Modification: If your classroom is cramped, you can do this activity in lines between desks, having students in one line step to the left (the last person in line moves to the front of the line). If your class size is large, you can make smaller circles or shorter lines with three or four groups of students.*

## 5. Class Debrief on Identities

(5 minutes)

- a) Ask students to share their responses to the three questions and any patterns they noticed.
- b) Be sure to highlight to students that they are all from the same culture but

have differences in identities. Draw the students' attention to the left and right sides of their Venn diagram, where culture and identity are separated.

- c) Now draw the students' attention to the center of the Venn diagram. Make sure students understand that sometimes identity and culture can be the same.

For a shorter lesson, end the discussion of identities here. Skip to Step 9 as the final step. Alternative ticket-out-the-door activities include sharing the identity wheels in a class blog or website and asking students to comment on what they noticed about each other's wheels or write their own definition of *identity*.

For a longer lesson that connects identity and culture, continue with Steps 6 through 8 and finish with Steps 9 and 10.

## 6. Linking Identities to Culture (15 minutes)

- a) Use your identity wheel as a model again. Do a think-aloud to show students your thinking as you identify a culture on your wheel. You might say the following:

“Look here at my wheel. Do you see *gamer*? Picture a gamer in your mind. Do I talk like a gamer? Do I dress like a gamer? No? Why not? That's right—because now I am in my *English teacher* identity. Right now, I am communicating, acting, and dressed like a teacher. In this context, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to dress or talk like a gamer. In my wheel, we see at least two cultures: teacher culture and gamer culture.”

- b) Choose an example that is *not* a culture to show the difference to students.

Think aloud (use the following as an example): “But look here. What about *daughter*? Is there a shared culture between people who identify as daughters? Do all daughters dress the same, use the same language, and share a similar history? No, they don't. On my wheel, daughter wouldn't be an example of a culture—only an identity.”

- c) Ask students to look at their wheel and list as many cultures that they are members of, based on their identities.

## 7. Think-Pair-Share to Generate Ideas (15 minutes)

- a) Write the following questions on the board, or display them on a screen. Students should choose two of the cultures they listed in Step 6c to answer the questions. Have students **think** silently about their answers. They might want to take notes. (5 minutes)

- *What knowledge do you need to be able to successfully participate in these cultures?*
- *Do you feel different when you are participating in these cultures?*
- *How do you know when you're in one culture and not the other?*
- *What is your attitude toward the differences? Toward the similarities?*
- *What skills do you have that make you a member of each culture? How do you talk, dress, or behave? Do you try to fit in? How? (What do you have to change about yourself in order to be included or comfortable in these two cultures?)*

- b) **Pair** students and have them share their ideas with each other. (5 minutes)

- c) Have students **share** what their partner said in response to these questions. (5 minutes)

**8. Introducing ICC and KSAs**  
(25 minutes)

- a) Draw or display the chart in Figure 4 (or you can pass out paper copies). Ask students to read it silently by themselves.
- b) Make sure all students understand the diagram by asking comprehension questions:
- “How are *knowledge* and *attitudes* and *skills* related?”
  - “Are attitudes always positive? How can a negative or positive attitude affect intercultural communication?”
  - “Can we think of any more examples of knowledge or skills?”
- c) Use your identity wheel and culture examples from earlier in the lesson to do another think-aloud, showing the connection to the questions in Step 7a and the diagram:

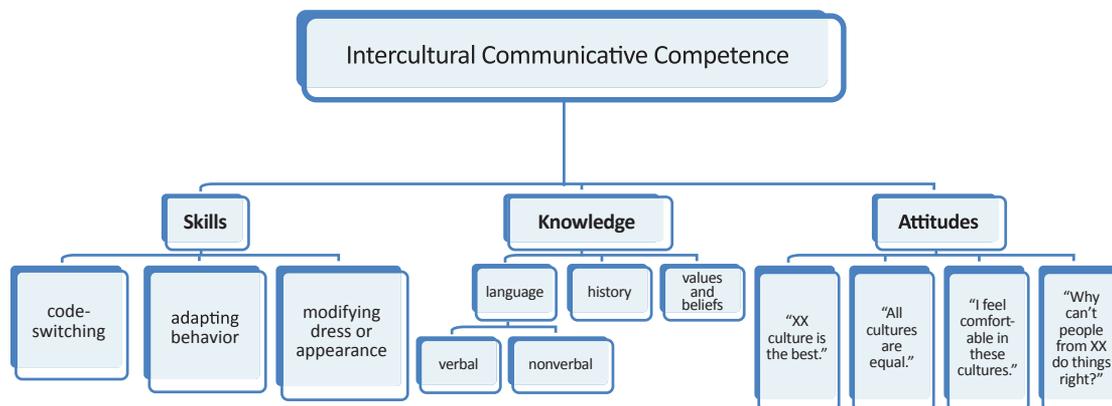
“Let’s think about my example of a gamer again. If you were to interact with me as a gamer, what would you need to know? The *knowledge*

might include the names of games, gaming platforms, abbreviations and acronyms, famous players, and popular games. What are your *attitudes* towards games? How will they affect the way you talk to me? Maybe you think video games are cool, and you want to learn more about them. Maybe you think video games are a waste of time. Do you identify as a gamer? How does your awareness of being a member of this culture or not affect how you would approach me? Finally, what *skills* can you use to connect with me? You might switch to a more informal style of speech, use game-specific language to make plans with me, or try to train with a game you know I like.”

- d) Ask for a volunteer to share one identity/ culture on his or her wheel. Guide the class through this series of questions again as a group, discussing what KSAs they can use to connect with this student’s culture.
- e) Pair students together and have them practice analyzing cultures on their identity wheels by using KSAs.

**9. Reexamining the Class Definitions of Culture and Identity** (5 minutes)

- a) Display the two definitions the class created in Step 1e.



**Figure 4. KSAs in ICC, with examples**

- b) Ask students, “Is there anything we learned during class that would change these definitions?”
- c) Edit the class definitions to reflect the new knowledge and suggested changes. Examples of changes might include how one person has multiple identities or cultures and how a country might have an overall culture and many subcultures.

- b) You can instruct students by saying, “I am passing out your ticket-out-the-door [or homework]. Take a look—you will see the three elements we discussed today: knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Choose a country where English is widely spoken. List things you know about that country’s culture under *knowledge*. List different attitudes that exist towards that country’s culture under *attitudes* (this can be your attitude and others’). Finally, list specific *skills* you can use to communicate with someone from that country.”

**10. Ticket-out-the-Door or Homework: Application to English-Speaking Cultures (5–10 minutes)**

- a) Pass out the prepared/printed ticket-out-the-door/homework sheet (see Figure 5). Students must fill out the chart and turn it in either before they leave class (for tickets-out-the-door) or before the next class (for homework). This chart can serve as a link to a following lesson to discuss how to use ICC with speakers of English from other countries and cultures. It can also serve as formative assessment to show what the students have learned and already know before moving on. Based on student responses, you can further the explanation of any of these concepts in a following lesson.

**REFERENCE**

Neuliep, J. W. 2015. *Intercultural communication*, 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

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**Ticket-Out-The-Door**

<p><b>Directions:</b> Today in class we analyzed a small culture connected to your identity. Let’s apply the same analysis method to a culture unrelated to your identity. Think about a primarily English-speaking country (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom), then fill out the chart with information to help you with your interactions with people from that country.</p>		
Knowledge	Attitudes	Skills

**Figure 5. Ticket-out-the-door/homework sheet**