



CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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CONTENTS

- **What is cross-cultural competence and why is it important in the business English classroom?**
- **Building culture-general knowledge**
- **Practicing cross-cultural skills**
- **Developing positive cross-cultural attitudes**
- **Closing thoughts**

This webinar focuses on the business English classroom, but the content can be adapted for use in many different teaching contexts

CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- ➔ Being able to adapt to norms of different cultures and interact with people from those cultures effectively through a set of **culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes**

CULTURE-GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

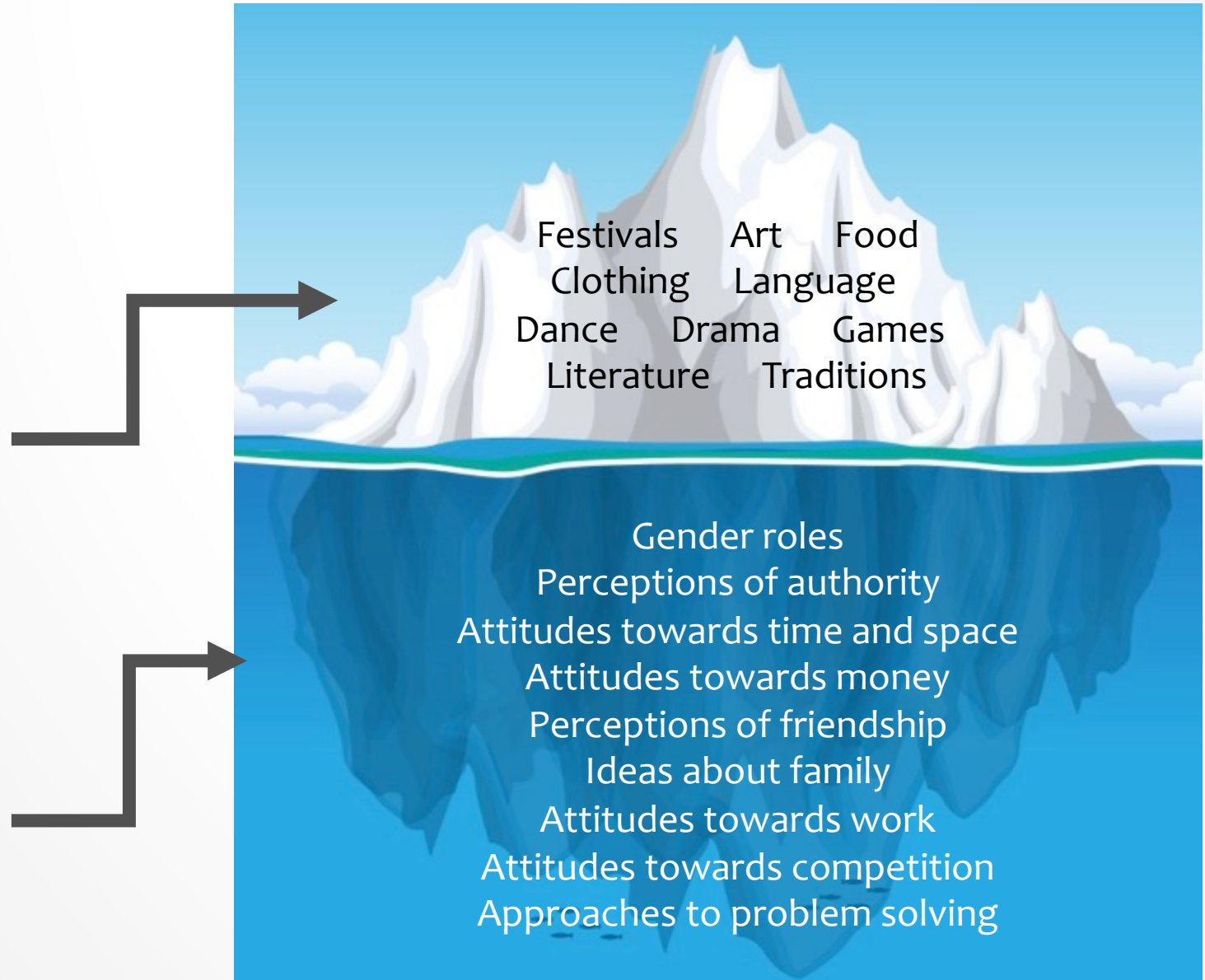


WHAT IS CULTURE?

culture /ˈkʌl.tʃə/

noun

1. the arts and other examples of human creativity shared by a group
2. the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society



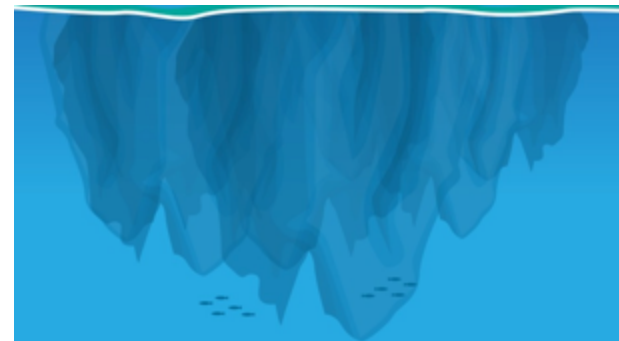
(Adapted from Hall, 1976)

(Adapted from Merriam Webster Dictionary for English Language Learners online)

Classroom activity

WHO ARE WE? *Raising cultural awareness*

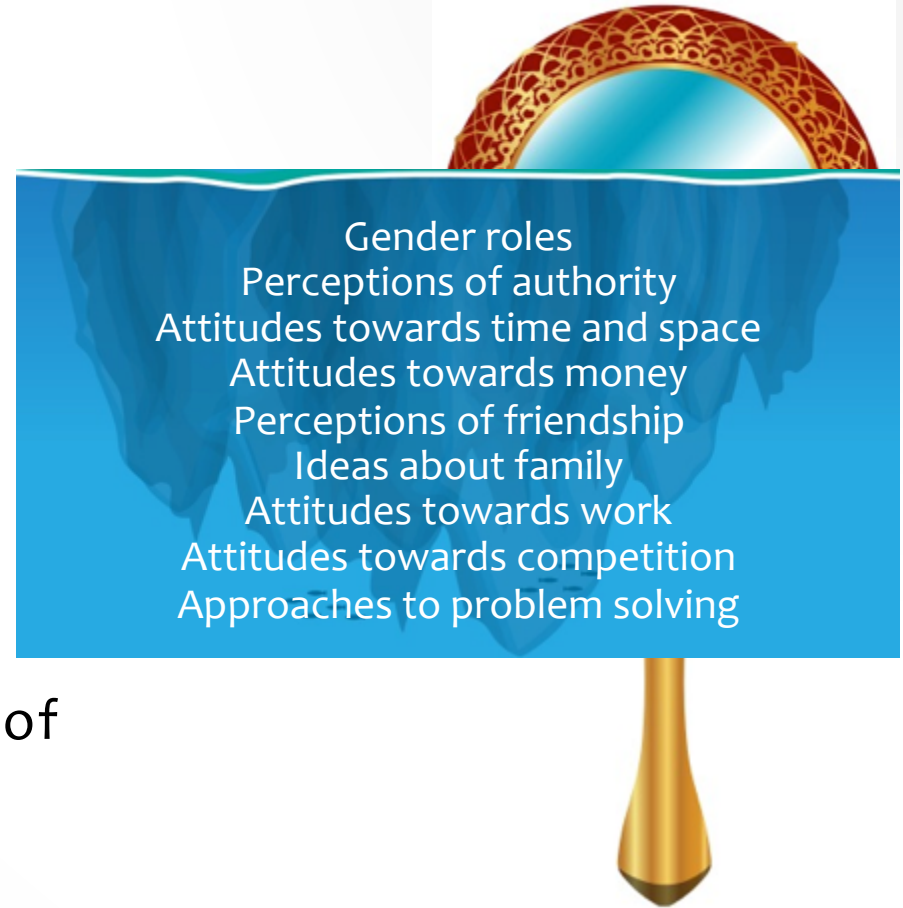
- As a class, brainstorm characteristics of your students' culture(s); write ideas on the board
- Draw an iceberg on the board; introduce the “culture iceberg” analogy
- Form small groups; classify examples on the board into two categories
 - **on the surface** – what any visitor to your country would see
 - **under the surface** – what visitors would only notice after interacting with many people in several different contexts



Classroom activity

WHO ARE WE? *Raising cultural awareness*

- Students may find it hard to name the “under the surface” characteristics of their own culture
- Discuss the characteristics they do name
- Suggest others for discussion
- Reflect on why it can be hard to name these aspects of one's own culture



HOW CULTURES DIFFER: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

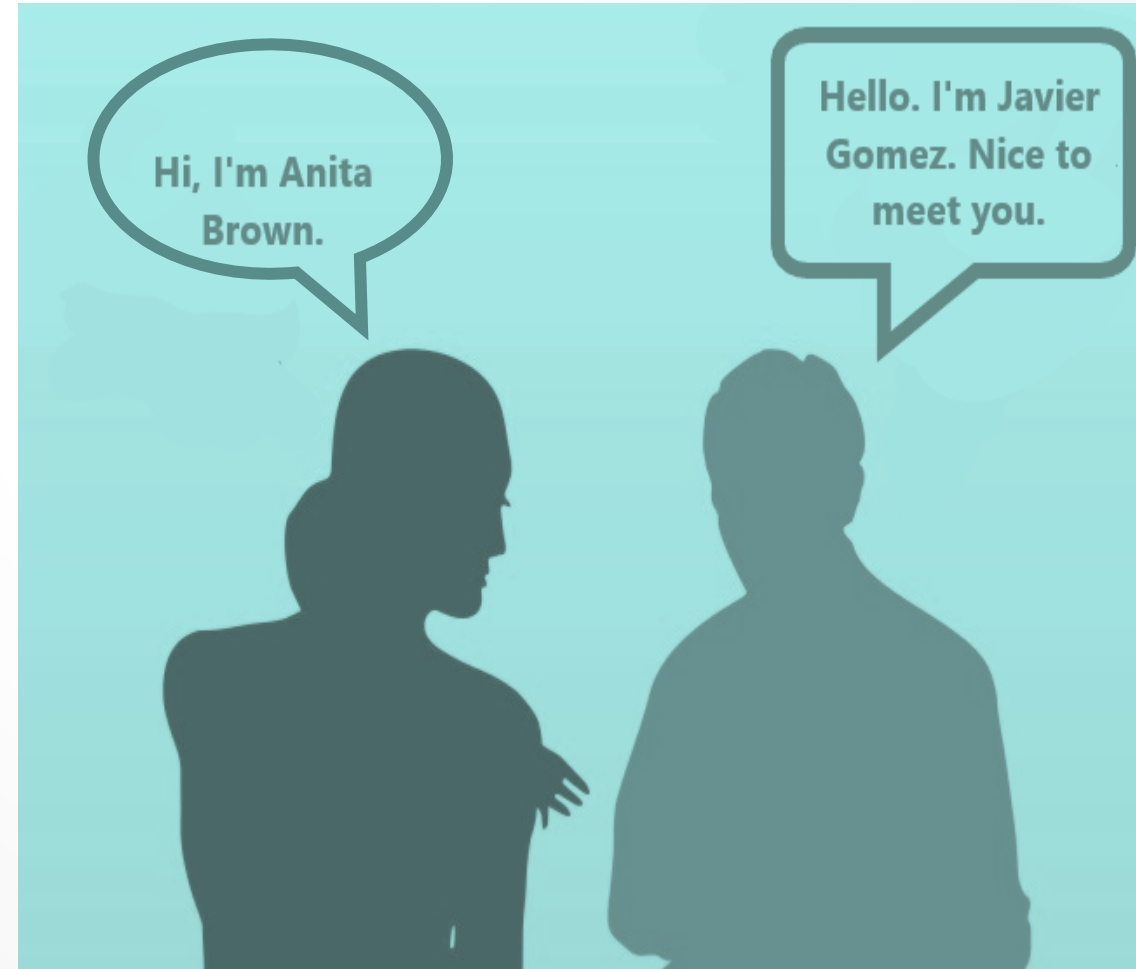
- facial displays
- eye behaviors
- movement and gestures
- touch behaviors (haptics)
- vocal behaviors
- the use of space (proxemics)
- physical appearance
- the use of time (chronemics)



Classroom activity

A STRANGE PARTY

- Tell your students they are on a business trip and they have been invited to a party -- a perfect opportunity to practice small talk!
- The party guests will be a diverse group, and each student must play a role in creating this diversity
- Give every student one of the following cultural roles to play



Classroom activity

A STRANGE PARTY

Culture 1: People in your culture like to laugh and speak very loudly to demonstrate that they are having a good time. You also stand quite close to one another when interacting.

Culture 3: People in your culture stand very close to one another when talking and often place their hand on the other person's arm or shoulder during a conversation to show their good intentions.

Culture 2: People in your culture never break eye contact during a conversation. When meeting people, you maintain the handshake and look directly into the other person's eyes for several seconds to establish trust.

Culture 4: People in your culture prefer to interact in soft voices, and they do not feel comfortable touching or being touched by people they don't know very well. You like to have quite a large "personal space".

Classroom activity

A STRANGE PARTY



1. After your students have read and understood their roles, tell them to stand up
2. Clear a large space in the center of the room and play some background music
3. Tell students to make small talk with one another, acting like a person from their “culture” as described in their roles
 - Make sure students know that **they should demonstrate their culture through their behaviors, not talk about it or show anyone their card**
4. Let students interact with several different people before you turn the music down to indicate the end of the activity

Classroom activity

A STRANGE PARTY



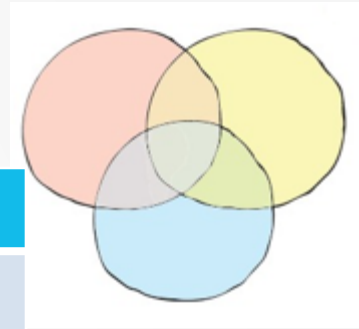
5. Next, ask students to identify other people from their “culture” and sit down together with them;
 - You can assign each group a color at this point so other groups will know what to call them
6. Ask each group to list the non-verbal behaviors of each of the other “cultures” at the party
7. Get back together as a class; talk about what students saw other students doing and how it made them feel

Classroom activity

A STRANGE PARTY: follow-up

<u>Non-verbal behaviors</u>	Culture 1	Culture 2	Culture 3	Culture 4	Our culture
Eye-contact	?	never stops	?	?	
Personal space	small	?	small	large	
Vocal behaviors	loud, laugh	?	?	soft voices	
Touching	?	long handshake	frequent contact	don't like	

HOW DO CULTURES DIFFER?



High-Context	Low-Context
Indirect and implicit messages	Direct, simple, and clear messages
Do lots of things at once; time is flexible	Do one thing at a time; strict about time
High use of non-verbal communication	Low use of non-verbal communication
Prefer to communicate verbally rather than in writing	Prefer to communicate in writing
Use intuition and feelings to make decisions	Rely on facts and evidence for decisions
Negotiations slow (haggling is expected)	Negotiations fast (no haggling)
Relationships are more important than schedules: establish social trust first	Schedules are more important than relationships: get down to business almost immediately

(Adapted from Hall, Edward (1976) Beyond Culture. Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press.)



QUIZ!

ARE YOU FROM A HIGH-CONTEXT OR A LOW-CONTEXT CULTURE?

Answer “Yes” or “No” to the following questions.

ARE YOU FROM A HIGH-CONTEXT OR LOW-CONTEXT CULTURE?

Answer “Yes” or “No” to the following questions.

1. In your culture, is it okay to call your teacher or boss by his or her first name?
2. Do you feel frustrated when people do not answer your questions directly?
3. Is it important to you that many people know about your personal accomplishments?
4. Do you feel comfortable with short-term casual friendships?
5. Do you rely more on words than on body language to express yourself?



ARE YOU FROM A HIGH-CONTEXT OR LOW-CONTEXT CULTURE?

Answer “Yes” or “No” to the following questions.

6. Do you look for rational solutions to problems or personal ones?
7. When learning something new or solving a problem, do you prefer to work alone or with a group?
8. When you are working towards an objective, is the result as important as the personal relationships you develop?
9. Is your identity strongly defined outside of group associations (family, work, culture)?
10. Do you feel conflict is a necessary part of human relations and should not be avoided?



PRACTICING CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS



CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS

Face

Our self-image and the importance we place on how we appear to other people

Saving face

Maintaining our self-image, avoiding humiliation or embarrassment by something we say or do or something someone else says or does to us

Losing face

Feeling that others might think negatively of us, feeling that we will be less highly respected due to something we've said or done or something someone else has said or done to us



Classroom activity

Case studies of face-saving and face-losing scenarios

Ms. Chen is visiting your factory from China. Her company is exploring the possibility of using your company as their primary distributor in Eastern Europe. Your boss, Ms. Krajnc [krayntz], has asked you to accompany her as she shows Ms. Chen the facilities. Ms. Chen's English is very good, but she continually mispronounces your boss's name, almost beyond recognition. You've already corrected her several times. Ms. Chen has a radio interview this evening to talk about the possible collaboration.

- Summarize the problem
- Brainstorm options
- List positive and negative consequences of each option
- Decide the best way to deal with the situation



TYPES OF POLITENESS

Negative politeness: used when the speaker thinks he or she will be imposing on the listener; includes things like being indirect, using hedges, apologizing

*I hate to ask you, but would you mind giving your presentation first?
If you'd rather not, don't worry, I can work it out.*

Message: Can you give your presentation first?

There seems to be a slight problem with your order.

Message: There's something wrong with your order.



TYPES OF POLITENESS

Positive politeness: used to make the hearer feel good about him or herself; includes things like being optimistic, using inclusive language, joking, and communicating empathy



This took me a long time to figure out, but you seem to be getting the hang of it really quickly.

Message: *You are a competent person.*

These Czech names are so hard to pronounce! Even Czechs don't know how to say them!

Message: *I understand your problem. You are not alone.*

Classroom activity

SAY IT POLITELY!

1. Write different possibly embarrassing situations on pieces of paper and stick them to your students' backs
2. Students stand up and transmit the message in a way that doesn't make the other person feel bad

My credit card has been declined.

It looks like there may be some kind of problem with your card.

I included incorrect numbers in my presentation.

I think you may have made a typo with this number here...



3. Each student then writes the real message she thinks is on her back on the board



DEVELOPING POSITIVE CROSS-CULTURAL ATTITUDES

POSITIVE CROSS-CULTURAL ATTITUDES

- **Openness** – acceptance of difference
- **Flexibility** – acceptance of ambiguity
- **Humility** – suspension of judgement, willingness to learn
- **Sensitivity to others** – ability to “read” others
- **Interest in others** – empathy, compassion
- **A spirit of adventure** – curiosity
- **Sense of humor** – ability to laugh at ourselves



Classroom activity

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Remind students what non-verbal communication is and the different ways we use our bodies to communicate, both consciously and unconsciously
- Put students in groups of 3 and tell them they're going to watch a short video clip, but they aren't going to be able to hear the actors
- Watch the clip in silence once, focusing on the aspects of non-verbal communication you mentioned before and on the relationships between the people, what they might be talking about, how they react to one another, etc.
- Watch the clip again and then ask the groups to answer the questions



Classroom activity

WHAT'S GOING ON?



Classroom activity

WHAT'S GOING ON?

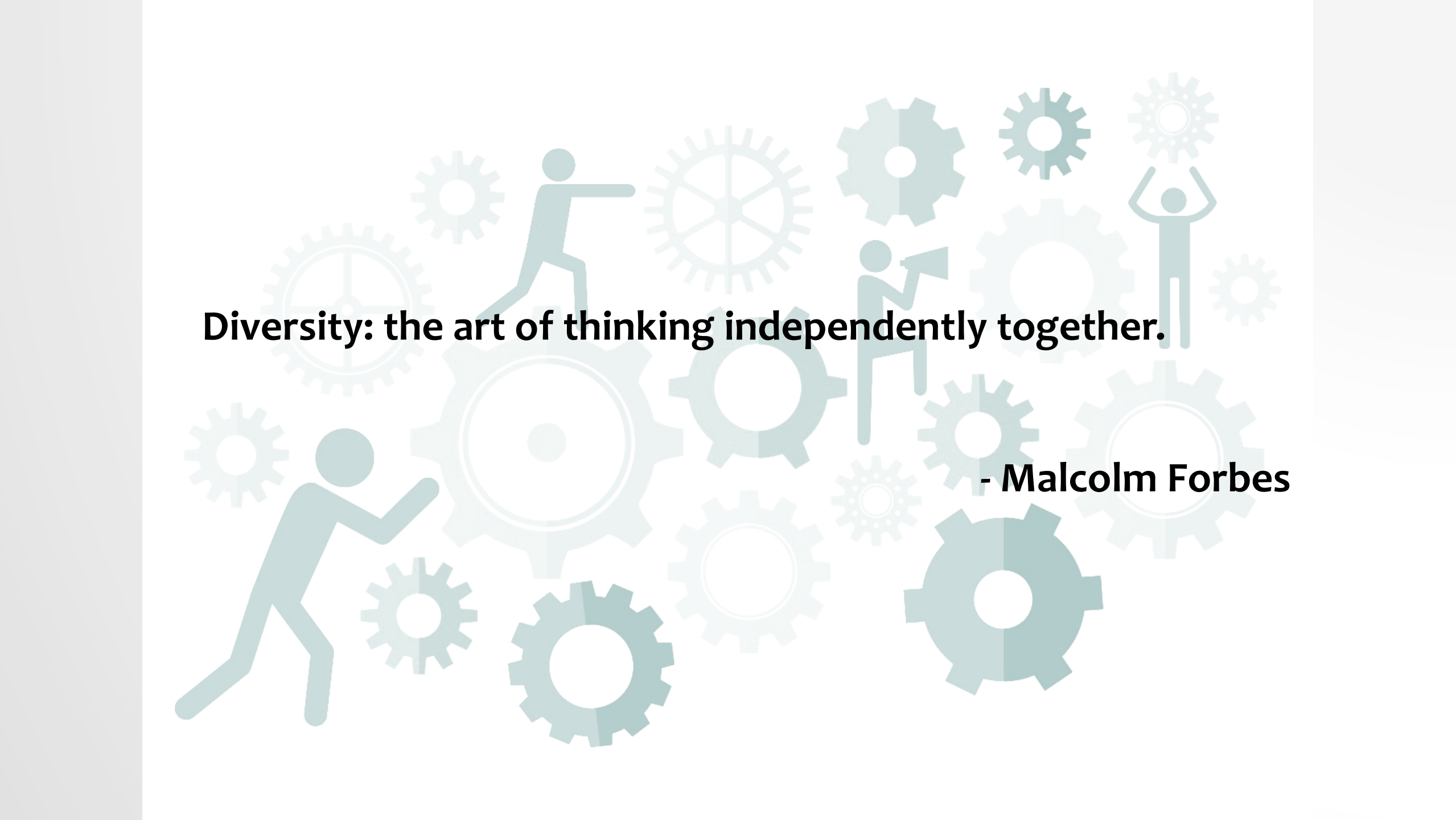
- What is happening in the clip?
- What is the relationship among the different people in the video?
- What is the attitude or personality of the man in the blue shirt?
- What do you think the man in blue shirt is talking about?
- How do the woman and the man in the suit react to him?
- Do you think this was a successful interaction? Why or why not?



Classroom activity

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Discuss the students' answers to the questions as a whole class
- Tell students to answer the questionnaire again, but with different answers this time (you might want to play the clip again)
- Talk about experiences of being surrounded by people speaking another language and having to guess what's going on
- Lead students to the conclusion that their interpretations are based on their own cultural experiences and that there may well be other explanations for the things they see

The background features a collection of teal-colored gears of various sizes and human silhouettes. Some figures are pushing or pulling gears, while others are holding them up or using tools like a megaphone. The overall theme is teamwork and mechanical synergy.

Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.

- Malcolm Forbes

IMAGE CREDITS

All images are from [Vecteezy.com](https://www.vecteezy.com)