

Sabira Stahlberg

Multi
coloured
book



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Multicoloured book

A multicultural reader



Helsingfors / Helsinki 2020

Easy to Read

Level 1 - easiest

Level 2 - easier

Level 3 - easy

Cover photo: Sabira Stahlberg

Swedish original: *Brokiga boken* (2018)

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Helsingfors / Helsinki 2020

ISBN 978-952-7334-38-6 (paper book)

ISBN 978-952-7334-39-3 (PDF)

Introduction

This book of colourful stories has grown from my experiences when living in several countries and my international work training migrants, expats, exchange students and others, who move from one culture to another. For the past decades, I have met and worked with hundreds of people in new situations, needing to adjust to cultures, languages and societies functioning differently than those they are used to.

Some years ago I teamed up with Colorit ry. rf., an organisation working with multicultural questions in Finland. Together we planned the concept for this book. With Colorit I have carried out several projects, among them multilingual and multicultural creative writing workshops *Multicoloured pen* and *Multicoloured stories* (Brokiga pennan and Brokiga berättelser), and writing combined with music, *Clang* (Klang).

Our original idea was to prepare a manual for all who work with integration in the Swedish-speaking community in Finland. Swedish is one of the official languages and every year dozens of migrants decide to integrate in this language. Talking about the project with teachers, persons

integrating and many others, we found that there is a much bigger need for another kind of texts – for encouraging discussions and team work. A multicultural reader would be more beneficial than an manual full of valuable advice aimed only at experts.

This book can be used as a reader, extra-curricular reading, self-study or for introducing debates in groups and classes. The tasks after each chapter stimulate thinking, language use, conversational and analytic skills, supporting the user to meet challenges in everyday life.

My thanks go to all, who have shared their experiences and opinions. The Swedish original was supported by the *Tre Smeder Foundation*. This English version, an Easy to Read, has been partly rewritten and adapted for international readers. For two decades, I have written almost two dozen Easy books in Finland-Swedish and also translated them into English. Together with teacher and book illustrator Maria Viitasalo, I have developed Pedagogical Easy to Reads and three language levels, which facilitate choosing the right text. The language levels concern only the difficulty of language, not the contents.

Sabira Stahlberg

Important

This book is based on materials, experiences, discussions and questions gathered during my many moves between languages, cultures and places. In an increasingly polarised, politicised and emotional global debate about integration and multiculturalism, knowledge is required to find solutions. Debates usually operate more on myths than facts. Too seldom the voices of those who have experience and understanding of the issues are listened to, or even heard.

A multilingual and multicultural childhood prepared me for working in several countries with different “multi”-topics, writing, debating, lecturing, teaching and training at universities and schools, workshops, courses, seminars and conferences. The persons described in this book are not based on specific individuals, but reflect the most common reactions and attitudes. *Any similarities to individuals, living or dead, are purely coincidental.* Opinions or questions are often expressed in the text and their aim is to create debates. They may occasionally be seen as provocative, but do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the author or Colorit ry. rf.

Multicultural

Who is a foreigner? Often it means a person who is different, a visitor or someone who has moved to another country. Cultural encounters push us to learn new things, because the other place and the other people are different. A common stereotype, based on generalised ideas, tells us to assume that a person, who originates in a certain place, must function in the manner of that country or region. I am still hoping to meet that stereotypical person.

More often, to be a foreigner means that you are tired of questions. Everybody wants to know where you come from and why you are here and not there. 'How long have you lived in this place?' 'When do you intend to go home again?' It is not easy to explain that home is right here. You live in this town or village and probably intend to stay. How do you explain politely that you have heard those questions a thousand times, or do you just become rude?

You have certainly also heard too many times what people *think* they know about the place you come from. 'So, you are from Finland? You must be used to snow and ice all year,

working for Santa Claus, blond, blue-eyed and very tall (why are you not?!).’

In some countries, people like to believe that nobody seriously wishes to move there. The place is too cold, hot, dark, the sun is strong or life is difficult and insecure. Possibly people are not very sociable – or they are happy only when they mess with your life. The basic reason for such beliefs is that they do not know how to deal with foreigners: they lack experience and cultural skills. Whatever the case, *nobody has the reason or right to ask why you are here*. We do not ask intimate questions of every person we meet for the first time. Someone might have moved for private reasons, or the questions can rip up painful wounds and memories.

We want to be individuals and should see each other person as an individual, too. A useful way of communication is to talk as we speak with friends. Small talk can create dialogue. We are already good at communicating and do it all the time. The step to take is quite small. *Cultural competence* relies on knowledge, experience and consciousness, but most of all the ability to communicate and being yourself. If we manage to look behind cultural and linguistic masks and see a human being, we have succeeded.

Integration and adaptation

Most peoples believe they are unique. This is an illusion created by nationalism in the nineteenth century. The challenges an outsider meets in a new community are actually almost the same all over the world. We are human beings and react in similar ways.

Integration means that we become able to function in another society. Appearance often affects how we are treated by others, but also our skills, how we behave and talk contribute to the degree of integration. If we adjust at least a little, life can be easier and we meet with more understanding. We do not need to *assimilate* completely, but always possess the space to be ourselves and different, except in the countries where brutal assimilation is state policy.

Assimilation and *adaptation* are not same. We adapt our behaviour to situations, conditions and society, how much is our individual choice. We may choose to follow certain ways or values, but to refuse others; decisions and responsibility are our own. Integration means that we join the society and find a place in it. We should look at the overall picture: how do we function in this

community? Societies with multicultural history could provide better chances to integrate, but not necessarily. If groups and individuals have integrated keeping their culture and language, there is an experience society might – or might not – have learned from.

Adaptation and integration are normal social processes we keep doing all our lives. If we move back to where we started, we again need to adapt and integrate into society. We have changed. Time has not stopped in the meantime and the society we left is not the same anymore.

Adaptation and integration can be tiring or frustrating and cause stress or cultural shock. But they could also be exciting and rewarding adventures. We learn about ourselves, discover new perspectives and get fresh impulses.

Cultural shock

Cultural shock is a popular name for adjusting difficulties in new surroundings. Cultural shock can be divided into periods. In the first *romantic* stage we are delighted with everything and just love the new place. Then something occurs and

the rose-tinted glasses turn black. We fall into despair or depression. If we give enough time to ourselves to absorb and process the impressions and experiences, while trying to go on with our everyday life, most probably we can walk out of the shock soon.

In the following phase, we learn to accept more of the strange things and attitudes going against our own values. We realise that we do not need to hold the same opinions as the majority to live in this society. At that point we stop thinking in collective terms and seeing “everybody” as the same. We notice individuals and variations and how society functions below the surface. To prevent or reduce cultural shock, we need to be informed and collect experiences. Discussing with others and reading up on the Internet or in books and articles what others in the same situation have experienced can be useful. Talk openly about the shock.

Still, discrimination, conflicts and bullying happen, mostly at schools, workplaces and in the street. They can contribute to cultural shock. If you never had any trouble, you’re really lucky. Regrettably throughout human societies both bullying and discrimination are common and they do not only target foreigners. Some people

see the world in black and white. One side is good, so the other must be bad, just like supporting one football team and hating the other, because they play against the favourites. In reality, nobody fits into the model and no individual is totally one or the other.

When conflicts, discrimination or bullying occurs, we must act at once: find out how to stop it, who can help and how to handle the situation. If we have read up or have experience about integration and the challenges we might meet when adapting to another society, we are more able to prevent and solve conflicts.

Discuss and analyse

Discussing positive and negative experiences and analysing various situations in a group is an interesting and stimulating way to prevent difficulties, get fresh insights and discover also different points of view. We can increase our understanding about each other outside the usual stereotypes and find common things and new subjects to talk about, and make friends with people who are both similar and different from ourselves.

The texts in this book aim at encouraging debates and analyses. They can be thought-provoking or raise strong feelings and reactions. The tasks after the texts support and enhance reading comprehension and language skills and offer further materials for discussions.

I strongly suggest teachers and learners also create their own activities around the texts, for example dramatise or invent creative work through various art forms, music or anything you can imagine or invent. Write a song or story or paint a picture or do something else you like and which makes you cooperate and find out more about yourself and the others.

The texts are mainly intended for adults, but also youth and children can work with them. Reading aloud in class can be a way to enhance language comprehension skills and lower the barriers for speaking. Group or pair work can sometimes be more rewarding than working in the whole class. For students of Swedish, multilingual reading of this book in both English and Swedish can support language learning.

Enjoy!

Level 1 - easiest

All texts in this book are Easy to Reads. This means that they are easier to read, because they are written in a special way. It also means that language learners can more easily understand them.

In Level 1, we use simple words and short sentences. Often a sentence is only one line, but sometimes they are longer.

Even if the sentences are short, it does not mean you are reading a poem. The lines are short to make it easier for you to read the text.

From Level 2 the lines are longer and the texts look more like in an “ordinary” book.

Everybody asks

Everybody asks me: What is your name?
Where do you come from? Why are you here?
They also ask: What language do you speak?
Where is your home? Why are you not there?
Then everyone asks: Do you have a family?
How many children do you have?
Where is your family?

I try to be polite,
so I answer all questions.
But everyone asks the same thing.
I am tired of answering.
Of course I have a family: who does not?
Naturally I have a home, too.
But I do not want to talk
about it with strangers.
It's none of their business. My life is private.

I also do not represent the country,
where I was born and grew up.
I am simply myself
and I have my own interests.
Why do they believe I am like all others
from the country where I grew up?

They know nothing about me.
Why does everybody think
they know what I am?

I answer: What is your name?
Where do *you* come from?
Or: I come from the Moon.
My family lives on Mars.
But nobody understands that.
They get angry with me.

I want to talk about other things.
Give me different questions!
I wish people would ask me:
What is your name? How are you?
Which books do you like?
What kind of films do you prefer?
Do you like fish? What are you doing today?

They should also ask:
What kind of music do you like?
Which sports do you prefer?
Where would you like to travel?
Where shall we go tonight?
If they do not know what to say,
they can always ask this question:
What do you think about the weather?

Tasks for *Everybody asks*

- Do you recognise the situation?
- What does everybody ask you?
- Why do people ask these questions?
- What do you want to ask other people?
- Write you answers to the questions.
First write polite answers.
Then write funny or crazy replies.
- How are you today?
How do you feel?
- Talk about what kinds of books you like.
- Explain which films you have seen and liked.
- Talk about music you are fond of.
- What kind of sports do you prefer?
- Do you like eating fish?
What kind of fish?
Why do you not eat fish?
- What are your favourite foods?
- Where do you want to travel and why?
- Explain what kind of weather you like.
Why do you prefer it?
- What are you doing tonight?

My friend Lily

I have a friend called Lily.
In real life she has another name,
but let's call her Lily.
Lily has a lot of opinions.
She thinks that people in this country
are not helpful enough to those,
who come from abroad.

'Why is there no information in
other languages?' she asks.
'I want to read those brochures
in my own language.'

Yesterday Lily visited the tax office.
'They do not understand
what I want', she cries.
It happens every time.
Nobody understands Lily.
She is always upset and angry.
'I want to integrate into this society',
she says. 'But how can I do it?
They should help me more.'
Lily's goal in life is self-fulfilment.
She wants a good job, where she

can develop her skills.
She wants a big salary and lots of
nice colleagues she can go out with.
But nobody offers her a job,
which meets her expectations.
Lily thinks the salary is too low or
the working hours are too many.

Lily also wants to have many friends.
'People can't communicate', she complains.
'And their calendar is always full,
when I want to go out.
Nobody wants to sit with me in the bar.
They say that they must get up early
and work on the next day.
That is no excuse. I can have a drink
and be fresh again in the morning.'

Most of all the weather disturbs Lily.
It is always too cold or hot,
or much too rainy or sunny.
'I do *not* like darkness', she says.
'I become sad and depressed,
but the sun makes me tired, too.'
Lily is disappointed with almost everything.
'Why does life have to be so difficult
in this country?' she asks.

Tasks for *My friend Lily*

- Do you know someone like Lily?
Tell about that person.
- Do you see yourself in Lily?
Why? Why not?
- Why has Lily so many problems?
- How can Lily solve her troubles?
- Do you expect everything to be simple and easy? Why?
- Explain what problems you have or have had with bureaucracy in the new country.
- How do you look for and find jobs and friends?
- How do you solve or have solved problems when trying to integrate?
- Discuss your expectations of life in the new country.
- What did you expect of this society previously?
How does the reality look like?
What do you expect now?
- Do you have too high or too low expectations?
Why?
- What expectations are realistic?

Change languages

Changing languages is not that easy. Sometimes we mix languages or make a funny mistake, and everybody laughs. Often we lack words, especially if we recently began learning a new language.

When we learn a language we mostly start with the grammar. With the aid of grammar we get an idea of how the language functions.

It is also important to learn simple phrases to manage in daily life.

If we know a few useful phrases and the words we mostly need, we can manage quite well. Anyway, nobody speaks perfectly.

When I learn a new language I usually start with words for food and shopping. I learn to read signs in the streets and the menu in restaurants.

Besides learning grammar,
it is important to use the language
for talking and writing.
The brain creates a channel
for the new language.
It is like a radio channel.
The brain then starts working
in the new language.
At the same time we learn to communicate
and how to function in this society.

At first, we often translate from
our language to the new one.
The next step is to change languages
according to situations and persons.
To switch languages easily
we need a lot of training.
Some people learn switching as children.
Others train it when they are adults.

We can express different things
in different languages.
Did you know that every new language
increases the chances
that your brain remains active
when you get older?

Tasks for *Change languages*

- Which languages do you speak?
- Which languages can you write and read?
- What languages would you like to learn? Why?
- How do you learn languages?
Give examples of your methods.
- What kind of methods work for you?
- Is it easy for you to learn languages? Why?
- Do you change languages easily and naturally?
- How do you do it, when you switch languages? Explain.
- How does it feel, when you speak or write in different languages?
- Do you become another person or behave differently, when you speak another language?
- What kind of new things do you learn together with a new language? Give examples.
- What can you express in one language, but not in another?
- Discuss how you learn languages and what supports your learning.
- Give advice to someone, who wishes to learn one of your languages.

You are different

'Here is your pot and your cutlery', says
the mother to me. 'Do not touch our things.'
I do not understand. I live in the family.
Do I look dirty? Is she afraid that
I will not wash dishes and clean up?
I feel like an outsider. A foreigner.

It is not a pleasant feeling. I want so much
to learn all I can about their culture.
How can I do it, if I am excluded?
I try to be kind and polite to win her confidence.
But it does not work. She is convinced that
foreigners must be kept separately.
Foreigners must be treated in a certain way.
Full stop. No discussion about it.

Do you recognise these opinions?
You are a foreigner, you do not understand.
You are exactly like all other foreigners.
You look different. You dress in the wrong way.
Do not try to be like us, it is impossible.
Foreigners smell and are dirty.
Go home! You have no reason
to be here and nobody wants you. Go!

Foreigners' knowledge and skills mean nothing:
Really, have you studied at a university?
So what! You are a foreigner anyway.
The most common attitude is:
Do not try to change our opinion
about foreigners!

In my experience, it can take many years
before we get accepted by some persons.
A few of them never accept us completely.
They simply cannot deal in a normal way
with someone from another background
or even change their prejudices.

In those cases, I try to accept
that they cannot change.
The most important thing is that
we manage to communicate in some way.
Otherwise we can simply avoid each other.

Some people see me at once
as a fellow human being.
With them it is possible to build a friendship,
which will last for a lifetime.

Tasks for *You are different*

- Have you experienced similar situations as the person in the text?
Tell about them. How did you feel?
- How do you react to the attitudes described in the text?
- How do you behave with persons from other countries or cultures?
- Do you have friends and acquaintances, who accept you the way you are?
Tell about them.
- What do people expect you to do, when they know you are from a certain country?
- Do you expect to become a new person in a new country? Why (not)?
- How are you treated in the new society?
Do you want to change that way?
How can you change it?
- Discuss strategies.
What can you do,
when someone is unable to
talk normally with foreigners?

Step on toes

'In Scandinavia, one easily steps on the toes of people', Charlie says. "To step on someone's toes" is a saying. It means that you say something, which makes others react strongly.

"People feel that I insult or injure them also when I don't mean it.'

Charlie shakes his head.

'I have lived for many years in Scandinavia, but I will probably never learn to speak in the Scandinavian way. Elsewhere in the world I can say things that are not accepted in the North.'

Charlie scratches his head.

'Here I must always be very careful with what and how I say something.

Raising my voice is a bad thing.

I must not use certain words or expressions, which are considered wrong.

Why are they wrong?

Nobody can explain.'

Charlie sips some water and continues:

'The problem is that what I say is often understood exactly as I say it. Maybe I do not think carefully enough before I open my mouth. The persons I speak to also make their own interpretations of the words I use.'

Charlie frowns.

'In other parts of the world, people do not care so much about what precisely or how I talk. The important thing is what is behind it. People are able to analyse what I say. They do not take everything so seriously. They ask what intentions I have and why I say those things.'

Charlie sighs deeply.

'How can one learn to talk with people in Scandinavia? Do I have to adapt to their ways? Could they not learn that there are other ways to express yourself, too?'

Tasks for *Step on toes*

- Have you stepped on anybody's toes by saying something "wrong"? Explain.
- What can you say or not say in your culture and in other cultures? Give examples.
- When do you feel insulted? Explain also why.
- What do you need to be careful about when talking with people in this society?
- Which words and expressions should you use and which should you avoid?
- Discuss why people are sensitive to certain words and expressions.
Why are people so touchy?
Where does this sensitivity lead to?
- How do you act, when you have said something that another person finds insulting? What do you say?
- How can we learn to talk in another way? Give examples of strategies.
- Should we adapt to the way of the society around us? Why (not)?

Level 2 - easier

At level 2 we use more difficult words. The text is no longer written in short lines.

Now the lines are longer, like in any book.

Why is it important to use various language levels? When you learn a new language, it is useful to start with simple texts.

When you learn more words and grammar, you need more difficult texts. Soon you can read also complete books.

The language levels have nothing to do with how difficult the theme or topic is. A text in Easy language can discuss complicated questions, too, which might take time to think and answer.

Have a pleasant journey with the following chapters!

Speak Chinese

I am going to China.

‘Have you been there before?’ my friends ask.

Yes, I have visited China. It was an exciting trip.

But I did not understand much, because I could not talk or speak Chinese then.

Now I am going to visit China again. I am studying Chinese at the university.

‘You speak Chinese very well’, says my teacher. He is from China. He thinks we all speak wonderful Chinese.

I am only sure that I speak fairly well. At least it sounds like Chinese. I can also read and write a little. I am proud of my skills.

‘Are you not afraid of travelling alone?’ my friends ask. No, I am not afraid. I can speak, read and write. I have been to China before. I will manage by myself.

I travel by train to China. The trip takes a whole week. The train stops at a big station in Siberia. All passengers get out. They want to breathe fresh air. They stand outside the train and talk to each other.

Beside the train, a young man is standing. He must be from China, I think. He does not say

a word. Perhaps he does not understand what the others are talking?

I feel sorry for him. He stands alone on the platform. It is not nice for anybody to be lonely. I should talk to him. You see, I know Chinese!

‘Hello’, I say to him. ‘What is your name? Where are you going? Do you like travelling?’

The man stares at me. What is wrong? I wonder. Did he not understand me?

Maybe I said something funny?

He starts to laugh. He laughs like he is crazy. The other passengers are surprised. They turn around and gape at him.

‘What is so amusing?’ a woman asks.

I don’t know how to answer. I feel angry. I think the man is very impudent. Maybe I do not speak Chinese that well, but he could at least be polite to me.

Now everyone on the platform is staring at us. The young man continues to laugh. He can hardly stand on his feet.

Oh, no! On one side of the platform our train is waiting. On the other side is an empty track. Another train is pulling in.

‘Help’, I cry. The man is laughing so much that he almost falls under the incoming train.

I quickly grab his arm and pull him away.
He is still laughing.

Now I am really angry with myself. I also feel ashamed. Certainly my Chinese is very bad. I ought to be quiet until I can talk in that new language perfectly.

I am a total idiot!

Take a break for tasks...

- What kind of places do you like? Why?
- How do you like to travel?
By train, bus, air or bicycle?
- With whom do you prefer to travel? Why?
- Where do you wish to travel? Why?
- What do you say to someone, who stands alone or does not understand the language?
- Have you been misunderstood? How?
- Discuss the text.
Why is the man laughing?
- Why does the speaker feel ashamed?
- Is the speaker acting correctly? Why (not)?

Continue reading...

The train whistles.

'Get back into the train', the conductor shouts. I let go of the young man's arm and run to the door. He is following me.

I go to my compartment. The train starts moving. I feel irritated.

'Wait', the man cries. I turn around. He is speaking Chinese to me.

'Please excuse me', the man says. 'Thank you for saving me.'

'Never mind', I reply sourly.

'I must ask you to forgive me', he smiles. 'I was so surprised. I have never before met a foreigner who can speak Chinese fluently.'

'That is not true', I reply. 'I am a beginner.'

I am still quite angry. But the man laughs and says:

'Do you like noodles? May I invite you for lunch?'

'If you promise not to laugh when I say something wrong', I say.

'I will only giggle', he promises.

Survive

Right now I only feel like hiding under my bed cover. I do not want to meet or talk to anybody. I have no desire to think about anything at all or solve any problems. I am tired of everything and everybody. And I certainly do not want to adapt or try to be nice and polite.

Does this situation seem familiar? Have you experienced something similar? How do you react? Do you get out of the house, meet friends and complain to them how badly you feel? Or do you go home and turn off the phone and the rest of the world?

I take a break. I read a book or lie down on the sofa, watching television. No, that is not the right expression: I swallow books. I stare at the TV. I watch films I usually don't care about. But they make me forget everything else at least for some hours.

In fact, cooking is the activity that gets me in a really good mood. I look up recipes I really enjoy and prepare a fantastic dinner. I listen to music I love and dance to the music. Alone.

I also drink hot chocolate. Cocoa beans contain theobromine, which gives the body a

feeling of happiness. I go for long walks outside in nature. I do sports and I make sure that I sleep enough. Maybe I am simply tired and need to rest and do something different.

To write about my difficult feelings helps me empty my brain. While I write, I work with the experiences and feelings. I leave them on the paper. After writing I feel calm.

Sometimes it takes one day, sometimes up to one week until I feel well again. Often I simply need to break the everyday routines and provide enough time to be together with myself.

After that I can cope with the world once more and I feel in control of my life.

The problems are no longer the size of elephants. But only when I feel quite well, I turn on my phone.

Tasks for *Survive*

- How and when do you know that you need a break from everyday life?
- What do you usually do, when you cannot manage the world around you?
- Does it help what you do? Why (not)?
- How often do you feel that you have no strength left and only try to survive?
- How you feel homesick?
When you just want to go home or to leave this place, how do you deal with the feeling?
- Do you write a diary? Why (not)?
Does writing help to process your feelings?
- Write a short text about what you did yesterday, today and will do tomorrow.
- Write a diary for one week.
Read what you have written. How do you look now at events happening during that week?
- Discuss your strategies for survival, when everything seems difficult.
- Which methods would you recommend to others in these kinds of situations?
- What methods can others suggest to you?

Jones

Do you know Jones? He is a young man, who has adapted very well to the new society. His name is not originally Jones, but he took the name to fit in with everyone else.

‘People reacted on my foreign-sounding family name’, Jones explains. ‘Nobody calls me for a job interview or even to drink a cup of coffee.’

So Jones is now called Jones. He is really completely integrated. He has found a job he enjoys. Jones likes his life and himself. He has a girlfriend and a puppy and a car. Soon he will buy a house. Jones goes to all kinds of events and he knows everybody in this town and in the country.

Jones is more a citizen of this country than most other people I know. He dresses as he thinks the people here do. He has learnt to like the music of this culture and loves the food. He participates in all the celebrations.

He went to a course to learn folk dance and he sings in a choir. Jones speaks warmly of the local language and he knows who he is going to vote for in the next elections.

‘We must keep the local traditions alive’, Jones explains. He reads only local literature and supports only local teams in sports. Yes, you can say he has adapted to this specific society extremely well.

‘Hi Jones’, says one of his old friends. ‘Why don’t you come out for a beer with the others from our home country?’

‘No thank you’, Jones replies. ‘My country is this one. It is the best place on Earth. I do not want to be reminded of that place I grew up in.’

The old friend shrugs and wonders what it is wrong with Jones.

Has he become crazy?

Enough is enough, the friend thinks. He deletes Jones’ phone number. Then he goes out for a beer with the other fellows.

Tasks for *Jones*

- Do you know anybody like Jones?
Tell about the person.
- Why do some people react like Jones?
- Did Jones do the right thing,
when he assimilated
into the society?
Why?
- Can you adapt too well to a society?
Why?
- How much is too much,
when you are adjusting to another culture?
When do you lose your identity?
- What is your identity?
Do you have one or more identities?
Explain.
- How can one live with several identities?
Which challenges do you meet?
- Discuss integration and adaptation.
Where is the healthy balance?

Peel the onion

Cultures are like onions. So says a popular theory for how we learn about other cultures. You were born into a specific culture (or several) and started to learn it (or them) as a child. Often you pick up values without noticing. You believe they are the right ones.

Then you move to another country and find that nothing is as you believed. In addition to learning a new culture, you must change your views on the culture(s) of your childhood. Your values may be of little use in another country. You also need to learn new social habits.

Now we come to the onion. First we see the outer layer or peel of the onion. That is the surface of the new country. In the beginning we note mainly the differences, for example how people are dressed, or how buildings, streets, towns or the countryside look. We hear another kind of music, other rhythms and melodies and discover other colours and eat different food. Also the weather is not the same.

This is just the beginning.

After some time we start to peel the onion. The next layer appears. We start noticing how

people behave, which outer or public values they have and how the new society functions in general.

If we continue to peel the onion, we dig into more layers. Further inside we find the inner or real values that individuals carry but maybe do not express aloud. Perhaps they only allude to them or expect us to know what they mean.

We find now also opinions, which are not necessarily politically correct. Even further in, toward the heart of our onion, we find all kinds of experiences, personalities and most of all, other human beings, who are very much like ourselves. At the same time we can appreciate and see more of the cultural similarities and differences.

Everybody knows that while peeling an onion, occasionally tears flow. It depends both on the onion and how you peel it.

Tasks for *Peel the onion*

- What are the values in the society where you grew up?
Give examples.
- What kind of values have you encountered in the new society you are living in?
Give examples.
- Do you agree about these other values? Why?
- Do you share opinions, experiences or feelings with people around you?
Why (not)?
- Do you share the values of the society you grew up in still today?
Why?
- Do you share the opinions, experiences and feelings with people in your childhood country or countries you have lived in earlier? Why?
- How much of the onion in the new society have you peeled?
- How far have you peeled the onion of the society where you lived earlier?
- Discuss the onion.
Is it useful as a model, when learning another culture or another society? Why?

Home again

I am sitting in the airport. I am on my way back to Finland after many months abroad. During my journey I spoke only local languages. It seems I have not met anybody from Finland or the Nordic countries for ages.

I start wondering if I am sitting in the right place, but soon a couple appears. They sit down and start looking at their mobile phones. Then some teenagers come and put up their feet on the seats. They also stare at their telephones. Nobody speaks a word.

It is only six in the morning, but most of the passengers order wine on the flight. Several of them have apparently drowned their fear of flying already at the airport. There is a strange smell in the cabin.

When I land in Finland there is snow and ice everywhere. It is like a horrible nightmare. When I speak to my friends they are all tired, depressed or stressed.

How could I ever live here? Do I have the courage to I tell them that I feel wonderful?

I must get away from Finland. I have to go back to the happy and humane people, who

help each other and are polite. To people who politely ask for an apology, if they accidentally step on my toes in the bus or train. To people who smile and chat with me.

I suffer from a reverse cultural shock.

I have adapted to life elsewhere. When I return, I see suddenly everything in a different light. I notice things I have not seen before.

The cultural shock can sometimes hit you very hard.

I have experienced it before, so I know it will pass. After some time I get used to Finland again. But a small voice inside always reminds me that there is a world outside.

Tasks for *Home again*

- Have you experienced reverse cultural shock?
When, how and where?
- What kind of cultural shocks
have you experienced?
How did you react to them?
- What causes a cultural shock?
- Where and why do you get cultural shocks?
Explain your personal experiences.
- What will you do, when you get a cultural
shock or a reverse cultural shock?
- How can we prevent cultural shock?
- How can we deal with cultural shock?
- What methods do you know for
processing cultural shock?
- Discuss how cultural shocks affect your life
and your views of places,
where you have lived earlier
and where you live now.
- Discuss strategies to manage cultural shock
or reverse cultural shock.

Level 3 - easy

At level 3, more difficult words are used. The texts are still easy to read, but the sentences are longer and more complex. After level 3 you will most probably be able to read books and newspapers.

Easy to Read books support all who learn a new language by using common words and expressions. When you are reading texts in Easy language that are funny, exciting or interesting, you learn a new language without thinking about learning it.

The first Easy to Read books were created for persons, who have difficulties when reading. Among them are persons with dyslexia or other challenges.

Now Easy to Read books are used also in schools and courses, as extra reading or just for fun. The books develop all the time and you can today find Easy to Read books about advanced topics, too, for instance ethics and natural science, artificial intelligence or climate change.

May I disturb?

‘You are welcome into our society, but you must adapt yourself to our values and our way of life. You may live here, but you must not disturb us.’

Have you heard this before? It is not only in the country you are living in that many people have this attitude. It is found all over the world: ‘Do not bother us. Let us live as we always have lived. We do not want to change.’

This attitude is based on fears. Fear is a strong driving force in our psyche and it makes us react in different ways. Many people are afraid of new things and changes.

Being afraid means we feel insecure. At the same time it is an illusion that we can keep everything we have right now. All societies are in a process of transformation all the time. We can learn to live with changes and accept the fact that everything is being transformed with time. It does not feel so dangerous, when we see change as a natural phenomenon. The world changes around us and we ourselves move on in life. What will happen if we freeze the world and ourselves here and now? Would we feel good about it?

A society that stops taking impulses from others will soon be suffocated. Every society has changed many times in history and will continue to become different. Traditions, ways of thinking and values develop continuously.

A guest or tourist does not affect a society very much. Only if tourists become numerous they can bring about deeper changes. A person with another background, who stays and lives for a longer period in a society, can begin to influence it, both involuntarily and consciously. Larger groups of people, who come from another culture, can also bring more changes and challenges.

On the individual level, other thoughts, points of view, opinions and experiences first appear in the family, among relatives, friends and acquaintances, schools or work places. In constructive cases, dialogue is created between the participants. In the worst case there is no dialogue, but all keep to their original positions.

Those who come from elsewhere can also refuse to integrate and try to hold on to what they consider to be their ancient traditions. They want to protect themselves against everything new. The surrounding society does not see why they prefer to remain in a closed group. It is the

same fear for change that affects them as well. The situation can remain at a standstill and lead to hatred and violence unless something is done about it.

At the same time, some who move away can still influence the society where they lived earlier, for instance when visiting relatives and friends. No human being is completely immune against new impulses, even if we sometimes appear to be. If we every day meet people, who think and act in a different way, we will change.

There might also be tough confrontations between cultures, traditions and gender roles. What are the tasks and rights of women? Can a man and woman sleep in the same room before marriage? Should a man change diapers on the baby? Who makes the decisions in the family?

The general questions are many, but the solutions are individual. Each of us must solve our challenges in our own way. We do not need to move abroad in order to be different. In every society there are persons, who do not fit into the mainstream, and it has nothing to do with their ethnic or cultural background. At best, all of us learn something and find a way to live together and appreciate each other.

Tasks for *May I disturb?*

- Do you find that you or somebody else “disturbs” family, relatives or society with different values and way of life?
- In which way do you “disturb”?
How do others or society react to you?
- Have you experienced cultural conflicts?
Explain.
- How can the dialogue be improved between those who come from somewhere else and the society you live in?
- What are the main problems in creating dialogue between people?
How can we solve these problems?
- Discuss why it is important to be yourself and stand up for yourself, even when family, relatives or society put pressure on you.
How do you react to that pressure?
- What strategies can you use to be yourself and still be integrated in society?

Professional foreigner

‘When I am a guest, I always receive a great welcome’, Anna says. ‘Everybody wants to show the best they have and I am taken from one beautiful sight to the next which is an even better one. I am served the best food (or the most exotic) and receive all the attention I can wish for. You cannot imagine how fantastic it is!’

Anna loves the place and intends to live there. The sun is shining and on the beach the sand stays warm. The sea glitters. The city she enjoys as a tourist is simply wonderful. She can go to a café every morning and drink espresso.

Her friend Rosa receives photos and an enthusiastic message from Anna: ‘The cherry trees blossom already!’

Rosa has moved to another country and enjoys that everything is organised.

‘The people are very calm and keep to themselves. Nobody likes to poke the nose into my life. The streets are quiet and I have lots of nature around my house. I enjoy the peace and quiet. Life is good’, Rosa tells Anna.

One day autumn comes and then winter arrives with storms, rain and snow. The days are

dark, short and unpleasant. Anna wants to find a job. Rosa also want to start working. But nobody is looking for a foreigner, who does not speak the local language and lacks experience of the country.

Challenge number one. How are they going to survive abroad? They absolutely do not want to return home disappointed, or admit that they have failed.

‘Yes, Mother, everything is fine. My life is perfect. It is so wonderful here. I have lots of friends and acquaintances. You cannot believe how much fun I have here’, Anna tells her family on the phone. Rosa tells the same thing to her mother. Her mother can hear from the tone of voice that Rosa is not quite sincere.

‘Are you eating enough? Do you take care of yourself? You have become too skinny and do not seem to be well. How pale you are! Take the next flight home’, Mother cries over the phone.

Challenge number two is nagging doubt. Is this really the place where I want to live? Is it the right country for me? Do I want to live with persons, who react like people do here? Do I like the climate, the city and the lifestyle? Am I feeling good here? Can I eat the food I want to? And do I really have a nice life?

Sometimes Anna and Rosa find life good and everything is fine. Then something happens and they are ready to fly home immediately, but they are uncertain. 'No, I do not want to remain here! Yes, I will stay!'

After some time abroad they learn to take care of themselves. They have managed to deal with a few cultural shocks and new experiences are no longer that bad. Cultural shocks belong to life, that is how humans function. Life is not always a fairytale.

After many years living abroad or moving between a few countries they can turn into professional foreigners. Move to another country - really no problem. Everything will be well. We know the strategies and efficient ways to deal with differences and foreign situations.

Both Anna and Rosa also know now that they must be active themselves to find contacts, jobs and friends.

'Everyone else can manage their lives, so why shouldn't we do the same?' they say.

Tasks for *Professional foreigner*

- Have you had similar experiences like the characters in the text?
Tell about your experiences.
- What are your strategies, when you move to another country? Explain what you do.
- How good are you at changing countries or places?
- What does your mother or family say, when you tell them about your new surroundings?
- Discuss how we can move from one place to another in a simple and effective way.
- What topics or questions should you take into account when switching cultures?
- How can you make the move to another culture easier for yourself and others?
- How can you support a person who has difficulties with the new surroundings?
What do you tell that person?
- Are you a professional foreigner?
Why? Explain.

Bridge over differences

I have taken part in lots of courses, conferences and seminars, where people talk about cultural differences. We receive wonderful advice about how to treat and help people from other regions, countries and continents.

Everyone carries prejudices, those wise experts tell us. We are not born with them, but we learn them as children. Therefore we must now learn to deal with them.

Of course. I want to throw away all my prejudices and my preconceived opinions. But how could I do it, when the courses only give me advice to replace them with *new* preconceived opinions?

Everybody tells me how deep I should bow in Japan or how much I must (not) smile or laugh in various parts of the world. I know that I need to use more gestures in Mediterranean countries and keep my hands still and close to the body in Scandinavia.

Very helpful.

I have also understood what I can say or not say, how to nod or shake my head and how to address a person I do not know.

So far, so good.

I believe now that I know how to behave. My head is full of rules. But when I am in a real situation, where I am expected to do everything correctly, I lose them all.

The rules are dancing around in my poor brain and I cannot catch them. I turn into a wooden doll, I cannot move or talk. Where did it go wrong?

It took me many years to understand that I was looking at the topic from the wrong point of view. If we focus only on cultural differences, we lose an important detail. That fact is that we are all human beings, and as humans we have a wonderful ability to communicate.

It is not that important to bow in the exact angle or smile at the precisely right second. It is more important to be simply the person you are and show that you are open for dialogue with the person you meet. If we focus more on things which are common to us both, perhaps we can bridge over some of the differences.

Today there is Internet and we can easily obtain information about any country or region. We quickly discover what is common and what to take into account in order to avoid making complete fools of ourselves.

There are cultural differences and they are sometimes difficult to understand or learn. But if we are prepared, we can manage, even if we do not greet or talk in the exactly “right” way. Mostly it is quite enough to adapt to a couple of cultural and social aspects so that we do not to insult or shock people around us.

Most of all we need flexibility, a healthy distance to ourselves, and lots of humour.

A flexible person tries to learn from others and adapts the behaviour when necessary.

All with a healthy distance to themselves can laugh at errors. Everybody might put a foot in, so why take ourselves and life so seriously?

With a smile on your lips and with humour, you will get far.

Tasks for *Bridge over differences*

- When you meet a person from another culture, do you focus on cultural differences or on common factors? Why?
- How do you behave with a person from another continent or with another skin colour? Why?
- How skilled are you in seeing common factors between various cultures?
- Which common things do you find between your culture(s) and the culture(s) you are living in now?
- Discuss how focus on differences separates us and influences our world view.
- What new possibilities do we gain when we focus on common questions or topics?
- Do you have a healthy self-distance? Why (not)?
- How can we use humour in life? Give examples.

My new self

When you live abroad, your personality changes. You can of course live in a community with people from the same country. Then you do not need to change anything, almost, or at least you think so. You can speak your own language and eat food from your country and enjoy all the celebrations just like at home. It sounds secure and nice, does it not?

But if you want to integrate in another society, some changes are required. Maybe you change taste, lifestyle, routines, points of view and attitudes to yourself and the world around you. Are those changes positive, neutral or negative? I do not believe they can be put in only three categories. There are many nuances.

Some changes simply occur and you do not think much about them. You transform something in life without noticing it. Suddenly you discover that you have become another person compared with a few years ago.

The important question is: will you like yourself after five, ten or twenty years in this country? Who will you become? How do you behave? Do you accept yourself?

I have become too aggressive and use elbows everywhere, some complain. I shout at people and I get easily angry nowadays. I have no patience anymore.

I have become too kind, others say. I do not have the courage to say what I think, because someone may be hurt. I do not wish to insult other people.

I have more self-confidence, many nod in agreement. Now I can say what I really think. I did not dare to do that before.

I can manage anywhere in the world. I learned that by moving to another country, city, friends and jobs, some people say.

I enjoy life, others explain. I do not take myself or my life or anything else so seriously any longer.

The experiences are individual. They are based on how you see yourself and the world. What do you want to do? How do you wish to live? Which possibilities do you have to change your life? Who do you wish to become? Where and how would you like to live? What perspectives do you see for your future?

Some people like to choose an easy and comfortable life in order not to make difficult decisions. They learn what is needed to function

in the new society. Others choose to challenge themselves and learn new things. Maybe they participate in groups, associations, social work or politics.

Everyone has the right to choose their degree of adjustment and integration. There are no correct or wrong solutions, it is you who decide what you want to do and who you want to be.

But we all take our own responsibility and consequences of our decisions. We cannot accuse society or other people afterwards for our choices and for becoming the person we have turned into.

The most important question is that you like yourself. If you do not like yourself or your life, now is the time to do something about it.

Tasks for *My new self*

- Do you like yourself as you are?
Why? Why not?
- What can or do you want to change or improve about yourself?
- What kind of person were you five and ten years ago? What about today?
Explain how you have changed.
- Do you see changes as something positive?
Why?
- Look back at your life.
What have you learnt from it?
- How has life brought you to the point where you stand today?
- Where do you want life to take you in the future?
- What do you want to say to yourself five or ten years ago?
- What do you want to you say to yourself after five or ten years?
- Where do you want be and what will you do after five or ten years?
- What kind of person will you be in the future?

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Sabira Stahlberg has written several Easy to Read books. Sabira is an international lecturer and researcher working with integration, language learning and multicultural topics.



978-952-7334-38-6

ISBN 978-952-7334-38-6 (paper book)

ISBN 978-952-7334-39-3 (PDF)