



Educational Equity in Migration Societies

Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Programmes

- **Part B:** Module for Bachelor Programmes



Project: Reflecting Cultures of Education. Transnationality and Cultural Awareness in Early Childhood Education Programs (RECOdE)

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Contents

Preliminary remarks	04
1 Development of culturally aware competence in childhood education programmes	05
2 Requirements for culturally aware pedagogical action	05
3 Dimensions and facets of culturally aware competence	07
4 Curricular structuring and didactic-methodological implications	10
5 Implementing the modules in study programmes	12
6 Module handbook: Critical cultural awareness in early childhood education programmes	12
References	20

Preliminary remarks

The development of a module for teaching competencies in the context of cultural awareness in childhood education programmes is part of the project *Reflecting Cultures of Education – Transnationality and Cultural Awareness in Early Childhood Education Programs (RECOdE)* funded by Erasmus+. Together with the University of Stavanger (Norway) and Dublin City University (Ireland), the project develops a study programme that will provide students with key competencies for a culturally diverse working field. This includes, among other things, the development of the following competencies that are based on systematic literature research, interviews of childhood education students as well as workshops and discussions with lecturers and leaders of various European childhood education courses (e.g. Artevelde University of Applied Science, Ghent, Belgium; Ramon-Llull University Barcelona, Spain; Hogeschool KPZ, Zwolle, Netherlands).

1 Development of culturally aware competence in childhood education programmes

The aim of enabling students in childhood education degree programmes to act in a culturally sensitive way brings two questions to the fore: Firstly, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by culturally aware action, and secondly, the resulting requirements for action and the competencies required to deal with them must be determined more precisely. The first question was discussed with reference to the facilitation of equality, freedom and solidarity in the *Framework for Cultural Awareness* (RECOdE 2025b). The second question concerns the requirement to promote the development of certain professional skills and abilities, and the development of specific knowledge and skills. In addition, the initiation of certain motives is addressed. The prerequisite for this is not least the processing of specific content and the adequate design of sufficient didactic formats in childhood education qualification contexts. It is about imparting and acquiring specific theoretical knowledge, certain attitudes as well as methodical knowledge.

In the following, the requirements for culturally sensitive action in early-stage educational and support contexts are first described following this logic before detailing the facets of competence to be developed for this purpose in the study programme. This is followed by presentations on corresponding curricular contents and didactic-methodical implications.

2 Requirements for culturally aware pedagogical action

In the understanding taken as a basis here, culturally aware pedagogical action refers to action on various levels. The facilitation of equality, freedom and solidarity as a central goal of educational practice takes into account the current life situation and the individual needs and interests of children, but can only be pursued sustainably if future life situations and challenges as well as the institutional and power-related constellations that encompass the educational processes are taken into account or anticipated. This means, on the one hand, to perceive the child and their family in their respective social and cultural contexts, to recognise and accept the associated individual concerns and needs, to balance them out in the institutional setting and to adapt the everyday interactions accordingly. In the context of educational work with families with a refugee background and without knowledge of the respective majority language, this would mean, for example, establishing contacts with native speakers, offering language courses for parents, and enabling day-to-day support in children's daycare facilities. On the other hand, the conditions that frame this individual communication process – such as the general requirements of the education system and institutional action, the challenges, constraints and limitations contained therein, etc. – must also be taken into account. In these structures, capabilities must be sensitively developed, made possible and, if necessary, expanded in terms of boundary management. Following on from this, children must be empowered to act in such structures. In addition, or in

parallel, it is important to develop low-threshold access for families who have become distanced from the education and training system or the institutions of early education and who tend to behave rather cautiously overall. This includes establishing contacts within the system and reducing fears. At the same time, this also means further developing early childhood education institutions as a whole with regard to cultural awareness.

Against this background, an approach to professional early childhood education is necessary, which is situated in the critical-reflexive coupling of strategic success-oriented and communicative, understanding-orientated action. Strategic success-oriented or system-related strategic action means the pursuit of individual action goals as well as the mindful inclusion of rational rules and specifications for achieving system-related goals, while communicative and understanding-orientated action is geared towards understanding others and is to be understood as a process of agreement and negotiation among subjects (Habermas, 1984). A coupling of both forms does not mean a one-sided approach towards the standards and requirements inherent in the education system or the unquestioned implementation of these, but also their critical and context-related classification and examination, the inclusion of others' perspectives as well as options for boundary management and modification of specifications. The demand for educational specialists to orient subjective meaning not only to the dynamics of the education system and institutional processes of action, but also to the meanings of social and cultural lives as well as to the imperative ethical action is becoming apparent (Faas & Treptow, 2010). In the context of working with families and children with a refugee background, for example, consideration of system-related and institutional requirements and dynamics refers to integrating these into the daily life of daycare facilities within the framework of the prescribed rules and concepts (e.g. individual support, observation and documentation to record the child's state of development). At the same time, however, this also means identifying and questioning potential challenges as well as any uncertainties and fears, if necessary. Different ideas of parenting and education must be taken seriously in order to promote the development of children and families in the sense of human and children's rights.

Against this background, culturally aware educational action takes place in the context of standards formulated and demanded by structural framework conditions, the promotion of corresponding competencies as well as the facilitation of social justice, children's rights and the consideration of individual needs in connection with equality, freedom and solidarity. From this, the following requirements can be derived for pedagogical action that fundamentally includes cultural awareness as a requirement:

Tab. 1: Requirements for culturally sensitive action

Requirements for culturally aware action	
System-related strategic action	Communicative and understanding-orientated action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational mandate • (Educational) standards • Expertise • Professionalism / professional requirements • Development standards • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational mandate • (Educational) standards • Expertise • Professionalism / professional requirements • Development standards • ...

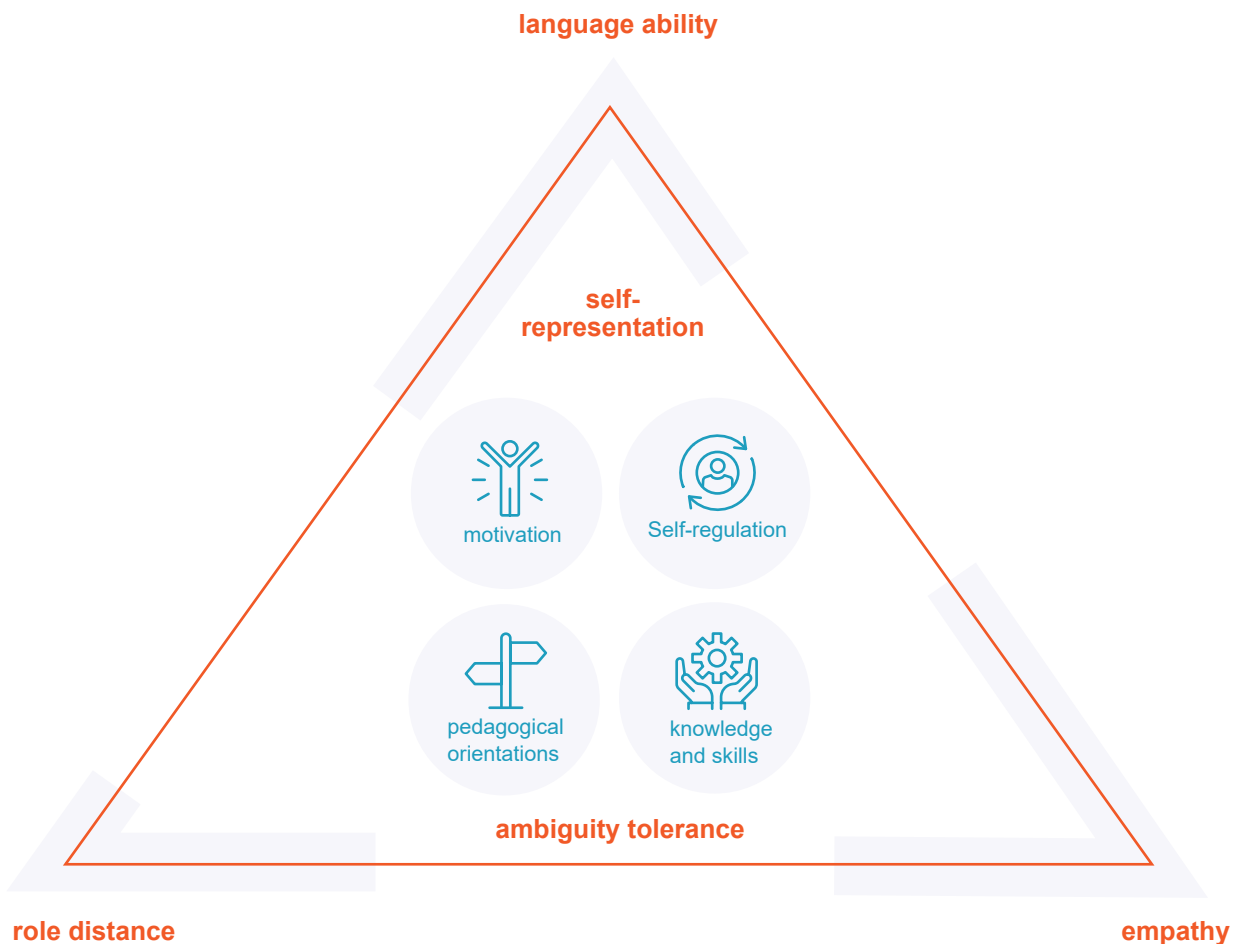
3 Dimensions and facets of culturally aware competence

The concretisation of the requirements for culturally aware action is followed by the question of the competencies required, i.e. the educational prerequisites which enable professionals to act in early childhood education and care settings in such a way that, in addition to taking into account general professional and occupational ethical principles, cultural differences between children, usually also their families, are sensitively received and dealt with. The main objective is to enable experiences of equality, freedom and solidarity at different levels.

In current academic debates, the concept of competence is used to specify the necessary educational prerequisites for coping with specific professional requirements. Often, so-called competency models are used, which distinguish different dimensions of competence (Baumert & Kunter, 2013). These include dispositions such as motivation, certain educational orientations, self-regulatory skills and knowledge. In view of the requirements for culturally aware action outlined above, competence can be broken down into system-related and communicative, understanding-oriented competence facets. System-related competence, on the one hand, specifically includes the knowledge of a profession, knowledge of the education system, including system-inherent dynamics, rules and specifications, aspects of professional ethics, related norms and values of educational action, etc. Communicative competence, on the other hand, refers to the ability to reflect critically on contexts and actions, for example with regard to structural inequality and discrimination or own educational practices and interactions. Furthermore, it involves fulfilling one's own professional role in such a way that both system-inherent requirements for action and special features of the individual case are taken into account and balanced in the context of understanding (Cloos & Faas 2021). The requirement to act in a communicative and understanding-oriented

manner also refers to specific communication skills sensitive to culture and inequality, as well as the ability to take the perspectives of others into account. This includes competence elements that Lothar Krappmann (1969) describes as identity-promoting skills in recourse to symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934; Goffman 1959): On the one hand, this means the ability to distance oneself from roles, i.e. the possibility of reflecting and interpreting oneself in relation to norms that become virulent in certain contexts, and on the other hand the ability to empathise, i.e. the ability to absorb the expectations of interaction partners and to take them into account in the action process. Added to this is the ability to tolerate ambiguity, which makes it possible to deal productively with ambiguities and contradictions, as well as the ability to make one's own personality and point of view visible in communication processes (self-representation) (Krappmann 1969). The latter also requires specific language skills (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Model of culturally aware competence



Based on this initially broad conceptualisation of culturally aware competence, further specific differentiations can be made. Central to this is the question of what students have to know and acquire in terms of developing culturally aware competences. In this context, a further specification can be made in the light of the professional requirements and facets of competence that have been identified thus far: Following the formulated system-related competencies, specific knowledge-related content can be formulated. These relate primarily to the actions and work with families and children in educational institutions; they are correspondingly organisational. This includes, for example, knowledge about the social living situations and conditions of families and children, about cultural and social similarities and differences, as well as related powerful and socially effective constructions of differences. It also deals with knowledge of international developments and their connection with political and social conditions, education systems and institutions. With regard to the communicative competencies outlined above, specific contents can also be identified that focus above all on personal actions. Not least, it addresses a reflective approach to one's own pedagogical actions when working with children and families. This also focuses on personal biographical aspects. Specifically, it concerns the development of a culturally aware professional attitude, specific cultural and inequality-aware dialogical competencies, and the ability to reflect critically on one's own life and privileges in this context (see Tab. 2).

Tab. 2: Specification of culturally aware competence.

Organisational action	Personal action
Knowledge of... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • life situations and circumstances of children and families • Cultural similarities and differences • the entanglement of education systems and educational institutions with the re-production of (cultural and social) inequalities • children's rights • social and political conditions • international development and its entanglement with national education systems, institutions and interactions • educational approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a culturally aware professional attitude • Recognition of cultural and social differences • Ability to deconstruct differences and its hierarchisation • Development of reflection skills • Reflection on one's own life and privileges • Dialogical competencies

4 Curricular structuring and didactic-methodological implications

Against the background of specific requirements for culturally aware action and the question of the educational prerequisites required to deal with them, two basic areas of competence can be distinguished: the organisational and the personal area of competence (see Tab. 3). The area of organisational competence focuses above all on scientific knowledge on how to act in the early childhood education system. Given the theoretical considerations that have already been made, the focus here is particularly on two areas of action and work for future professionals: working with children in childhood education institutions and working with families. Two courses in the area of organisational competence can then be derived from this field-related differentiation in the sense of a curricular structure: “Culturally aware action in childhood education institutions” and “Culturally aware action when working with families”. The teaching of scientific knowledge therefore focusses in particular on the specifics of these two areas. First of all, the significance of the term “critical cultural awareness” and the clarification of its reference theories must be considered. In addition, the focus is on the reflection of educational approaches and their potential for the establishment and further development of culturally aware practices in childhood education institutions and culturally aware work with families. In addition to theoretical content and pedagogical approaches, it is also necessary to impart analytical skills to include the life situations and environments of children and families and to assess reflexively social and cultural similarities and differences. Furthermore, international developments and their entanglement with national and regional contexts must be discussed, as well as educational and family policy conditions and their significance for working with children and families (e.g. for quality management or organisational development).

With regard to the requirements for communicative and understanding-orientated action, the second area of study focuses on the development and promotion of personal competence. The module “Professional and biographical reflection” focuses primarily on the critical examination of professional and personal attitudes in the context of critical, culturally aware action. It is not only a question of developing a professional attitude and role in dealing with cultural and social similarities and differences, but also of taking into account personal or social power structures, minority and majority relationships and possible contexts of discrimination. It is necessary to become aware of such entanglements and social involvement in order to reflect on one’s own prejudices and to question and deconstruct social and cultural inequality reproductions in educational practice. In this respect, a course is proposed on this topic area, which refers to professional reflection. This course focuses on the awareness of culturally and socially constructed differences, the development of a critical attitude towards socially implemented hierarchies and current educational practices in this context, and the development of communicative, culturally sensitive facets of competence. On the other hand, a course that focuses more strongly on biographical reflection seems necessary. This refers to the reflection of the own life world and biography against the background of social values and norms, privileges and prejudices (see Tab. 3).

Tab. 3: Culturally aware competence for working with children and families

Organisational competence	Personal competence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical approaches • Knowledge of the living conditions of children and families in a social and local context • Critical reflection of pedagogical approaches and their consideration of differences in order to avoid ethnocentric perspectives • Recognition of differences and heterogeneity in the management and development of educational institutions • Knowledge of implementing and considering children’s and families’ rights in institutional structures • Critical consideration of social and political conditions in the context of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... organisational development ... quality management ... Community orientation “Sozialraumorientierung”) ... collaborations and networks • Critical consideration of international developments and their entanglement with national education systems, institutions and interactions • Understanding structural inequalities and discrimination in order to recognise social constraints in this context and to deal with ambiguity tolerance • Critical reflection on institutional structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of cultural differences in the context of working with families and children • Decontextualising and deconstructing differences in educational contexts to realise children’s rights • Reflection on one’s own biography and life world against the background of social values and norms, privileges and power relations • Understanding the interconnectedness of biographical, social and cultural conditions in the context of pedagogical action • Communicative skills to deal with differences and heterogeneity in educational contexts in the sense of equality, freedom and solidarity • Attitude towards the implementation of equality, freedom, solidarity and children’s rights • Attitude towards dealing with exclusion, discrimination and structural disadvantages • Critical reflection on educational practices • Understand the living conditions of minorities in order to recognise social restrictions in this context and to deal with ambiguity tolerance • Ability to reflect and develop professional roles

5 Implementing the modules in study programmes

A fundamental assumption when describing culturally aware competencies and the question of their promotion in childhood education courses is to be seen in the fact that this is a cross-sectional educational topic. The requirements associated with professional action are relevant for all fields of childhood education. At the same time, *cultural awareness* refers to a wide range of topics and discursive references, which are already addressed in various areas in study programmes and their curricula and which has become subject of academic teaching. This should not least be due to the wide scope of the topic. Against this background, the differentiated modules here represent not only a concentration of the topics related to critical cultural awareness, but also a systematic differentiation of the study contents to be assessed as relevant in preparation for educational practices that are sensitive to inequality and culture. The implementation of the modules can be done in two ways in childhood education programmes:

- 1) The designed modules can be implemented as independent and differentiated modules and courses in already existing or newly designed early childhood education programmes.
- 2) The thematic grouping and differentiation of the modules offer the opportunity to pick out individual topic aspects in order to develop further and supplement existing modules or courses.

The study contents outlined in the following chapter are presented in the form of individual modules. The proposed number of ECTS credits, workload and eligibility requirements are also specified in accordance with study programme guidelines. For adaptation and implementation, these aspects must be tailored to the respective study course. The description also includes the individual competencies, content, work forms and literature.

6 Module handbook: Critical cultural awareness in early childhood education programmes

Module 1: Organisational competencies of critical, culturally aware action

- 1) Culturally aware action in childhood education institutions
- 2) Culturally aware action when working with families

Module 2: Personal competences of critical, culturally aware action

- 3) Case work
- 4) Biography work

Module 1: Organisational competencies of culturally aware action

Title: Culturally aware action in childhood education institutions		
ECTS: 3	Workload: 90	Contact time: 28 Self-study: 62
Duration and frequency: 1 x year	Participation requirements: -	Language: German / English
Qualification goal / competencies	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop an understanding of the term “critical cultural awareness” in the context of early childhood education and care and know relevant reference theories (recognition, justice, discrimination, inclusion/exclusion, migration) • can relate the different reference theories to working in childhood education institutions • understand the different living situations and environments of children and their importance for early childhood education and care • can relate and apply different educational approaches to enable critical culturally aware practices for working in early childhood education institutions (anti-bias approach, approaches of intercultural education, migration education, diversity education, inclusive education) • can critically reflect on pedagogical approaches with regard to their construction of differences • can assess the relationship between social/political conditions and education and care • can reflect on the relationship between international developments and national education systems • can reflect the entanglement of the education system with the (re-)production of social inequalities • can reflect the institutional structures of education in a culturally aware manner 	

Module contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories to reflect on critical cultural awareness (recognition theory, inclusion/exclusion, theories of justice, belonging, participation, construction of difference) • Cultural similarities and differences and doing difference • International developments (e.g. inclusion, standardisation, neoliberalism) and their significance for national education systems • Human rights (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) • Globalisation and localisation • Social and cultural inequalities in the education system • Critical reflection on political and educational conditions (e.g. orientation plan, standardisation, diagnostics) • Didactic materials of educational institutions (children's books, children's songs, play materials, etc.)
Learning formats	Lecture, group work, group discussions, presentation, see also the RECOdE toolkit (RECOdE 2025b)
Requirements for the awarding of credit points	Research paper or written examination
Suggested literature	<p>RECOdE (2025e). Educational Equity in Migration Societies. Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Programmes. Part D: „Enhancing Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Institution.“ - toolkit. https://recode-erasmus.com/</p> <p>Derman-Sparks L. & Olsen Edwards J. (2010). <i>Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves</i>. Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.</p> <p>Faas, S., Kasüschke, D., Nitecki, E., Urban, M., & Wasmuth, H. (Eds.). <i>Globalisation, Transformation, and Cultures in Early Childhood Education and Care</i>. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.</p> <p>Gillett-Swan, J. & Thelander, N. (Eds.) (2021). <i>Children's Rights from International Educational Perspectives</i>. Cham: Springer Nature.</p> <p>Vertovec, S. (2014). <i>Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies</i>. London: Routledge.</p>

Title: Culturally aware action when working with families

ECTS: 3	Workload: 90	Contact time: 28 Self-study: 62
Duration and frequency 1 x year	Participation requirements: -	Language: German / English
Qualification goals / competencies	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop the meaning of the term “critical cultural awareness” in the context of working with families • can relate different theories of the notion and concept to working with families (recognition, participation, discrimination) • understand the different living situations and environments of families • can apply different educational approaches of critical cultural awareness on the work with families (anti-bias approach, capability approach, human rights-related education) • understand the importance of human rights in the context of critical cultural awareness when working with families • can apply human rights to develop culturally aware practices and work with families • understand key national and international family policy developments • can relate the connection between social/political conditions to working with families 	
Module contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family cultures, social milieus • Life situations of families (poverty, migration, disability, refugee) • Educational approaches in the context of critical cultural awareness • Critical reflection on family policy conditions • Human rights 	
Learning formats	Lecture, group work, panel discussions, group discussions, presentations, see also the RECOdE toolkit (RECOdE 2025b)	

Requirements for the awarding of credit points	Research paper or written examination
Suggested literature	<p>RECOdE (2025e). Educational Equity in Migration Societies. Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Programmes. Part D: „Enhancing Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Institution.“ - toolkit. https://recode-erasmus.com/</p> <p>Fenstermaker, S. & West, C. (Eds.) (2009). <i>Doing Gender, Doing Difference. Inequality, Power, and Institutional Chance</i>. New York: Routledge.</p> <p>Jacob, W.J. & Holsinger, D.B. (Eds.) (2009). <i>Inequality in Education. Comparative and International Perspectives</i>. Hong Kong: Springer.</p> <p>Vertovec, S. (2014). <i>Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies</i>. London: Routledge.</p> <p>Zajda, J. & Ozdowski, S. (Eds.) (2017). <i>Globalisation, Human Rights Education and Reforms</i>. Dordrecht: Springer.</p>

Module 2: Personal competences of critical culturally aware action

Title: Case work		
ECTS: 3	Workload: 90	Contact time: 28 Self-study: 62
Duration and frequency: 1 x year	Participation requirements Module 1	Language: German / English
Qualification goals and competencies	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reflect upon and classify cultural and social similarities and differences of children and know the importance of difference constructions • are able to deal critically with cultural and social inequalities in educational practice and develop approaches to appreciate diversity • develop a professional attitude to reducing exclusion and discrimination • learn culturally aware communicative strategies for working in educational contexts • can reflect on their own professional role in enabling culturally aware settings • recognise and identify challenges and problems when working with children and families 	
Module contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies/video sequences for addressing the topic, reflection and recognition of cultural and social similarities and differences • Case studies/video sequences for reflecting on one's professional role • Communication approaches in the context of critical cultural awareness • Involving practical experiences of students • Development of didactic learning arrangements in culturally aware settings 	

Learning formats	Lecture, group work, panel discussions, group discussions, reflection exercises and talks, see also the RECOdE toolkit (RECOdE 2025b)
Requirements for the awarding of credit points	Reflection paper
Suggested literature	<p>RECOdE (2025e). Educational Equity in Migration Societies. Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Programmes. Part D: „Enhancing Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Institution.“ - toolkit. https://recode-erasmus.com/</p> <p>Dervin, F. (2016). <i>Interculturality in Education. A Theoretical and Methodological Toolbox</i>. London: Palgrave Macmillan.</p> <p>Einarsdottir, J., Juutinen, J., Emilson, A., Ólafsdóttir, S. M., Zachrisen, B., & Meuser, S. (2022). Children’s perspectives about belonging in educational settings in five European countries. <i>European Early Childhood Education Research Journal</i>, 30(3), 330–343.</p> <p>Johansson, E., Emilson, A., & Puroila, A.M. (Eds.) (2018). <i>Values in early childhood settings. Concepts, Approaches, Practices</i>. Cham: Springer.</p> <p>Perez, E. N. (2021). Teaching Race and Racism in Social Work Education. In C. C. Ozaki and L. Parsons (Eds.), <i>Teaching and Learning for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education</i> (pp. 177-198). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.</p>

Title: Biography work		
ECTS: 3	Workload: 90	Contact time: 28 <hr/> Self-study: 62
Duration and frequency 1 x year	Participation requirements Module 1	Language: German / English
Qualification goals / competencies	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • question normality assumptions and expectations as well as everyday theories • deal with self and external perceptions • can reflect on their own biography and life world against the background of social values and norms, privileges, influences, group-related identities and majority/minority relationships • can reflect on their own prejudices in the context of group-related attributions • develop strategies for dealing with own stereotypes • can reflect on their own experiences • develop a culturally aware attitude 	
Module contents	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biography work • Own life world of the students 	
Learning formats	Reflections in the group, reflection exercises and discussions, group work, see also the RECOdE toolkit (RECOdE 2025b)	
Requirements for the awarding of credit points	Reflection paper	
Suggested literature	<p>RRECOdE (2025e). Educational Equity in Migration Societies. Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Programmes. Part D: „Enhancing Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Institution.“ - toolkit. https://recode-erasmus.com/</p> <p>Derman-Sparks L. & Olsen Edwards, J. (2010). <i>Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves</i>. Washington DC: NAEYC.</p> <p>Pichon, H. W. (2021). What Is My Educational Experience? The Use of Autoethnography as an Instructional Tool in an Online Introduction to Educational Leadership Course. In C. C. Ozaki and L. Parsons (Eds.), <i>Teaching and Learning for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education</i> (pp. 243-279). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.</p>	

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