

## Exploring Cultural Identity

### Summary

This activity is a good starting point for an intercultural competence teacher training. It engages the participants in a process of identifying what they consider to be the most important dimensions of their own identity. Teachers look at their cultural heritage and privileges.

Stereotypes are examined as participants share stories about when they were proud to be part of a particular group and when it was especially hurtful to be associated with a particular group. The session concludes with personal reflections and group processing.

Other members of the school staff could also take part in this activity. It could also be adapted for work with families and carers.

### Description of the activity

1. Introduce the theme and the aim of the activity.
2. Invite the participants to reflect silently for a couple of minutes on the questions:
  - What are my historical and familial roots, values and beliefs?
  - What are my privileges?
  - What are my biases?
3. Distribute the activity handouts.
4. Instruct the participants to list one or more significant dimensions of their identity in each flower petal. Give them several examples.
5. Ask participants to pair up with someone they do not know very well. Invite them to introduce themselves.
6. Have participants share two stories with each other. First, they should share stories about when they felt especially proud to be associated with one of the identifiers they selected. Next, they should share a story about a time it was particularly painful to be associated with one of the identity dimensions they choose.
7. Ask the participants to share a stereotype they have heard about one dimension of their identity that fails to describe them accurately. Ask them to complete the sentence: "I am (a/an) \_\_\_\_\_ but I am NOT (a/an) \_\_\_\_\_."
8. Gather the whole group and form a big circle. Ask if anyone would like to share one of their stories with the group. Depending on the time, you could listen to several stories.
9. Invite everyone to read their statement. Ask the participants to respect and support each other.
10. Initiate group processing. Here are some sample questions:
  - Tell us about your experience today. What did you learn, what surprised you, what was meaningful to you?



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- What was the most challenging part of the activity?
- How did it feel to be able to stand up and challenge a stereotype about you?
- Where do stereotypes come from?
- How does this relate to your teaching experience?

11. Summarize the most important discoveries made during the activity. Share your personal convictions and identity statement.

12. Ask the group for feedback.

### Activity structure

- **Preferred premises of the activity:** Indoors or outdoors.
- **Resources needed:** photocopies of the activity handout for all participants; writing utensils.
- **Recommended number of people participating:** 6-40 teachers and members of the school staff.
- **Previous knowledge of participants necessary:** none.
- **Activity duration:** Depends on the size of the group. It could be done in 60 minutes in a small group. In larger groups, it could take 90 to 120 minutes.

### Learning Objectives

Trainees are able to explore important facets of their identity, cultural heritage and privileges. They share personal experiences of prejudice and mistreatment. This is particularly useful for teachers, who are going to tackle these sensitive issues in class.

### Expected Outcomes

The training activity will increase the self-awareness of the participants. It is an excellent opportunity for an intense intercultural dialogue in a diverse group. This will provide a reference point for teachers who need to design a culturally sensitive educational process.

### Target group

Teachers, school staff, student family members. The activity could be adapted for a homogeneous or a mixed group.

### Learning resources to be used with this activity

Activity handout (see next page)



### Facets of identity:

- Gender
- Nationality
- Race/Ethnicity
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Family Background
- Abilities/Disabilities
- Religion
- Educational Background
- Home/Geographic Roots
- Profession and work experience
- Political Affinities
- Socio-economic status

