

Venn Diagram Sharing

Purpose: To learn about each other, to identify commonalities and differences. To personalize the concept of culture, and to identify options related to instruction that support the intrinsic motivation of all students

Time: 30 minutes

Format: Triads and large group

Materials: Paper and markers

Process

Ask the entire group to consider the concept of culture and to name factors that might influence a person's cultural identity. People normally suggest possibilities as gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, language religion, food, and country of origin. Write down approximately seven to ten words that people call out.

The large group divides into triads, and each group draws a large, "three-circle" Venn diagram on paper. Each team member then selects one of the circles to represent her or himself. Triad members then select topics from the list of words that the large group has generated and begin to identify ways in which they are similar and different from one another in regard to each topic. Distinctive qualities such as languages spoken and ethnicity are entered in the portion of the person's circle that does not overlap anyone else's circle.

Some characteristics will be shared by only two group members, and in different pairs – for example, having siblings for the first and second students, and a community with significant influence on their lives for the second and third students. These are entered into the space intersected by the two circles belonging to the two people who share that particular characteristic. When all three triad members have a quality in common, they locate it in the center of the diagram, where all three circles intersect. Participants are encouraged to share information only on those topics that are comfortable for the triad.

After 15-20 minutes, participants take a short time to publically reflect on something that they had learned as a consequence of participating in the exercise. Some generalizations occur more frequently than others, for example, “We realized that we had more in common than we might have predicted” or “The more information people have about each other, the more open their conversations become.” This activity is often a good beginning for establishing a sense of community.

Our Stories

- Purpose:** To create a strong sense of community that recognizes each student's strengths and to practice introducing oneself and another person.
- Time:** 5 minutes per person plus a 2-minute introduction from a peer
- Format:** Presentation to an entire class
- Materials:** Students are encouraged to integrate technology and/or the arts into their presentations

Process

As part of this ongoing series of introductions, students sign up with a partner for a 15-minute block of time. Although students present their own story, for roughly 5 minutes they begin by introducing each other. This provides an occasion for students to become sufficiently acquainted with their partner to create a thoughtful introduction. It also provides practice introducing other people, which is a skill students can use throughout life. To exemplify the process, the teacher and a volunteer introduce each other and then one of them steps back for the other to share significant aspects of his or her life in a creative way.

Among teachers and students, the narratives have taken a variety of forms. Students have created PowerPoint presentations with photos organized around a theme such as people who stand behind me, places that taught me something important, my extended family, and so forth. The diversity of approaches has been as intriguing as the stories. One student shared a collection of textiles that represented significant memories, for example, a childhood quilt and a kitchen tablecloth. A middle school teacher who used the theme of places where he learned important things showed his middle school bus stop where he learned about bullying, the naval ship where he learned about racism in job assignments, and the college that prepared him to teach. A particularly significant influence was his childhood home, where he learned lifelong values from his mother who

had played a pivotal role in reparation to Japanese American families interned during World War II.

Through “Our Stories” students and teachers laugh together, listen to music, watch simulations, learn of great places and moments, and discover a variety of lives and perspectives. In addition to the ways in which this activity creates a stronger sense of community, it provides insight into how students’ personal and cultural experiences can be woven into the curriculum. It also contributes to an environment primed for risk-taking and collaboration, setting the stage and creating a human safety net for rigorous academic challenge.

Here are a few suggestions for assisting students in the preparation. Ask students to (1) have a plan for making sure their presentations are no more than 5 minutes long, (2) choose a theme and make an outline, (3) practice with a partner, (4) set the stage in advance to maximize time, (5) provide visuals that enhance your story, and (6) include things that make one’s life distinct.

You may also want to remind students that good stories are memorable, personal, simple, and powerful. They have emotional appeal and inspire others. Like good teachers, good storytellers use symbols and analogies to bring stories to life. They rarely rely just on one method of communication. This opportunity for multidimensional sharing requires time and would need to be adapted to different timeframes.

Two Wishes and a Truth

Purpose: To personalize the concept of culture and to identify options for instruction that supports the intrinsic motivation of a range of students

Time: 30 minutes

Format: Triads and large group

Process

Ask each person to write down three statements about her or himself: one that is true, and two that she or he wish to be true. For example, a high school student might write down that (a) she met Jay-Z in his dressing room, (b) she challenged Mayor Goodman to a footrace, and (c) she played in a polka band for her cousin's wedding. Triad partners take turns listening to each other's statements and try to guess which of the statements is the truth.

In situations with older students, the debriefing includes these questions: What occurs to you as a consequence of participating in this activity? When you guessed which of your partner's statements were true, how did you make that decision? (If appropriate) What is the difference between a generalization and a stereotype? Can you imagine a situation when your guess would have been influenced by a stereotype?

Decades and Diversity

- Purpose:** To learn more about the diversity among students
- Time:** 45 minutes
- Format:** Small groups with large group debrief
- Materials:** Note-taking materials for each group and a chart with five questions

Process

Ask students to interview and record the answers of an older family member about the person's high school experience, specifically related to the topics covered in questions A through H, below. (With younger students this may need to be revised.) In middle and high school classes with a large number of students from different geographical regions, this can be adapted to a place that they have lived that had a strong influence on their development. After students interview a family member (or gather in groups according to places they have lived), they discuss the answers they had recorded. Students form discussion groups according to the decade of their interviewee's last year of high school. For example, if it was 1980, the person would join the decade group that is 1980-1989, if it was 1993, the student would join the decade group that is 1990-1999, and so forth.

- A) What was your last year of school? (Refer to this year for the rest of the questions.)
- B) What did you like to do for fun on a Saturday night?
- C) What music or musical groups did you listen to?
- D) What kinds of clothes and styles were in fashion?
- E) What were important world events that occurred during this time?
- F) What behaviors were strongly considered to be wrong or taboo?
- G) What food did you most enjoy?
- H) What family or community events did you look forward to?

Decades groups (or geographical groups) share and record their interview data. Afterward, ask each group to report out question by question, revealing the range of responses for each question. For example, what the person they interviewed did for fun on a Saturday night, each decade group shares their responses to only that particular question. This allows for clear comparison across groups. Final debrief questions include the following: What generalizations can you make from the range of responses to each question? What connections can you make between this activity and the diversity among us? What does this activity help you to understand about each other culturally? What questions did this activity raise for you?

Photo Scavenger Hunt

Purpose: To promote relationships, teamwork, and familiarity with a school.

Time: 60 minutes

Format: Groups of three

Materials: One digital camera or smartphone per triad and a checklist of items to capture

Process

Print out a list of people, places, and things teams need to find, photograph, and explain. A sample list follows. It can be easily adapted for younger students.

- A staff member in the front office (Who is this person and what does he or she do?)
- Someone who works in the cafeteria (What is the person's name and what does he or she like most about his or her work?)
- Someone who keeps the school clean (What is the person's name and what does she or he do?)
- An interesting display of student work (What is the theme of the display and why is it interesting?)
- An encouraging sign or poster
- Three book titles that sound interesting
- Something healthy to eat in the cafeteria
- Eyeglasses that are round, oval, and square
- Something that you enjoy about school
- Something you'd like to change about school
- Something you'd like to further explore in school

Pair-Share, aka Elbow Partners or Turn and Learn Exercises

(all are similar and can be adapted for other purposes)

Purpose: To learn more about each other and each other's perspectives

Time: 15-20 minutes

Format: Dyads with large group debrief

Materials: Whiteboard, flip chart, markers, papers and pens

Process

For the purposes of reflection and sharing, select **one** of the following questions and ask the students to briefly think/write to themselves share their response with a person near them, then summarize their ideas. During the large-group debrief, record students' responses or ask volunteers to do so...

- 1) What is the significance of any part of your name to you?

Debrief Question: What are one or two thoughts that occur to you as a consequence of reflecting upon this question? What can we learn about each other and ourselves from this exercise?

- 2) What is one thing about our class (or school community) that an outsider might not realize at first glance?

Debrief Question: What are the implications of this exercise for our classroom or school? What are the implications of this exercise for you?

- 3) Draw a metaphorical illustration of a concept (such as motivation or another concept that is relevant to a learning experience) to share with your partner. [The teacher may want to create a "gallery" on a spare wall so that after students share images with a partner, the illustrations can be viewed by everyone.]

Debrief Question: How do you understand the picture that you drew? What can we say about our groups as a whole when we reflect upon the illustrations we shared?

“Ask Me About...” Posters

Purpose: To learn more about each other and each other’s perspectives.

Time: 30 minutes

Format: Triads with large group debrief

Materials: Construction paper, markers, tape or glue sticks

Process

Ask students to share something about themselves or an experience they have had that they value by creating individual posters that elicit others to ask them about the personal meaning of their drawing, symbol, or attached items. For example, a student who had recently traveled to Guatemala and who had in her possession a bean that can only be found in a certain region glued it to her paper. Across the top of the paper above her bean, she wrote, “Ask me about” and concluded the sentence with the bean she glued to her poster.

Note: This activity provides a good way for students to share experiences and can be adapted to projects students have already completed.

Multicultural Inventory

Purpose: To learn more about each other and gain respect for the diversity one finds within any group.

Time: 30 minutes

Format: Large group

Materials: Multicultural Inventory Questions (below)

Process

Share the Multicultural Inventory Questions and then ask students to move about the room to introduce themselves to each other and to identify any statements on the inventory that connect to the other person's attributes or experience. You may want to consider limiting the number of connections found within any single student to two statements.

Multicultural Inventory Questions

1. Speaks more than one language
2. Born in a country other than the United States
3. Raised by someone who was born in a country other than the United States
4. Has more than three siblings
5. Has a family member who speaks more than two languages
6. Is good at (or enjoys) something that isn't typical for his or her gender
7. Is friends with someone who is over 80 years old
8. Enjoys reading books written by an author who is from a background that is different than his or her own (give an example).
9. Enjoys listening to music by a musical artist who is from a background that is different than his or her own (give an example)
10. Traveled to a country where people speak Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, or a Mandarin dialect
11. (Create an attribute of your own)

Bio Poems

Purpose: To learn about other people while simultaneously expressing one's own needs and concerns. A bio-poem is a formulaic structure to create a poem expressing what the writer sees as a significant or meaningful about the subject's life.

Time: 45 minutes, including presentations

Format: Individuals and small or large groups (small groups if there are many participants)

Materials: Bio-Poem Structure (below)

Process

Discuss how students are going to use bio-poems to build community among themselves. Mention that the method is particularly useful for helping students in upper elementary, secondary, and postsecondary settings to see the personal dimensions of important figures. For example, students could write bio-poems about Jane Adams, Julius Caesar, or Frankenstein's monster. Or students visit a nursing home or homeless shelter and create a bio-poem that lets them enter the life of a person in one of those particular environments. In math or science class, students could write a bio-poem about an equation, a formula, or an approach to solving a problem (Bean, 1996). The formula and an example for writing a personal bio-poem is provided below.

LINE 1: First name

LINE 2: Four traits to describe a character (in this case, yourself)

LINE 3: Relative of _____ (brother of, sister of, and so on)

LINE 4: Who feels _____ (three items that relate to how you feel in this class)

LINE 5: Who needs _____ (three items that you feel you need to be successful)

LINE 6: Who fears _____ (three items related to this class or your experience as a learner)

LINE 7: Who gives _____ (three items that you can contribute to others in our class)

LINE 8: Who would like to _____ (three items related to goals for this class)

LINE 9: Last name

Bio-Poem Example

I am Kendra

Gardener, musician, determined, intense

Aunt of baby girl twins, youngest of four sisters, granddaughter of Victoria and Rasmea

Who feels curious, cautious, and connected

Who needs feedback, flexibility, and free time

Who fears ambiguity, deadlines, and bad grades

Who gives good listening, deep thinking, and laughter

Who would like to get my homework done in school, learn things to solve environmental problems, work with others

Las name, Young – forever

View From a Window

Purpose: To find commonalities with others

Time: 10 minutes

Format: Asynchronous class blog

Materials: Individual computers

Process

Tell students that they will be contributing to a class blog for introducing themselves to others. Explain that this exercise requires them to write a description of the view from a favorite window and to weave some autobiographical information into their description. For example, "I am looking out at a parking lot where people who come to visit us leave their cars. Although I lived in downtown Seattle, living downtown in Chicago is even better." They will read what others have written and respond to two peers' postings, explaining why they would like to trade places for the day.

Check-in Adjectives

Purpose: To connect with another person

Time: 10 minutes

Format: Synchronous chat room entry

Materials: Individual computers

Process

Students think of a word that describes how they are doing in the class or course. They post their word in the chat room as you call their name at the beginning of a class. Once all of the names have been called, students review the words and send a private message to someone whose word resonates with their own. Together they try to find additional adjectives that they have in common.

Interpretive Community Maps

Purpose: To personalize the concept of culture, especially as it relates to students' experience in the community, and to identify options for instruction that supports students' intrinsic motivation to learn

Time: 30 minutes

Format: Dyads, triads, or small groups

Materials: Chart paper, colored markers, masking tape for posting maps

Process

Ask students, in dyads, triads, or small groups, to think of the history, places, people, services, customs, and resources in their community that support learning about or enjoying cultural diversity. Ask students to propose a list of possibilities to include a comprehensive map. Because time constraints are generally a concern, ask students to narrow their lists to a few key sites. On a mural-sized sheet of paper, use colored markers to construct a collectively designed interpretive map. It does not need to conform to standard scale or cardinal directions. Students may, however, want to develop symbols or landscaping to enhance their contributions.

To extend this activity, divide the map into sections. Ask students to get into groups to design sections of a guidebook for the sections of the map. Guidebooks might include descriptions, lists, stories, illustrations, interviews, and so forth. In addition to information on various sites, they might offer community history, a community timeline, personal timelines, a local language survey, oral histories, discussion of social issues, and different people's beliefs about various community issues.

Dialogue Journals

Purpose: To enhance peer dialogue on issues related to a course or any other learning experience

Time: As needed

Format: Dyads

Materials: A journal or notebook

Process

Participants pair themselves off (or are asked to pair) with another person. At least once a week, partners are asked to write a reflective response to a question or experience as framed by you. For example, you may say, "Please use your dialogue journals this week to reflect on your experience of creating your senior biology projects." At a designated time each week, dialogue partners exchange journals, read one another's entry, and respond in writing in the part of their partner's journal that is reserved for such responses. Some students wish to have their partner write a response on the same page. Others reserve a section in the back of their journal, or in a separate journal, for their partner's response.

Entries to a partner's reflective response may include but are not limited to (1) asking for clarification or further support for an idea, (2) adding support or evidence for an idea, (3) extending examples of an idea, (4) offering related ideas, (5) raising alternate points of view, and (6) noting similarities or contrasts to a partner's response.

Response Cards

Purpose: To provide an opportunity for participants to equally express their response to a perspective, statement, or mini-lecture

Time: 1-2 minutes

Format: Individuals

Materials: Three 3 x 5 cards (one yellow, one red, one blue) for each participant

Process

Students write, "Interesting" on the yellow card, "I have a different perspective" on the red card, and "I'm confused" on the blue card. When asked to hold up a response card that best reflects their response to a perspective, statement, or mini-lecture, students hold up the yellow card if what has just transpired is interesting, the red card if they thin there is a different perspective, or the blue card if clarification is needed. This provides you with a way of connecting with the perspectives of the group and knowing if a presentation needs to be modified to respond to students' interests or concerns.

Fist-to-Five

- Purpose:** To check in with the perspectives of a group by using five fingers of a hand to give a scale response to a question. This strategy avoids forcing people to respond with a simple “yes” or “no” answer.
- Time:** 1-2 minutes
- Format:** Individuals
- Materials:** None, except one’s hand. Individuals who are physically unable to use a hand as a scale may wish to write – or have someone write – a number from one to five on a piece of paper and position it in a visible location near where they are seated.

Process

Ask students to raise the number of fingers on one of their hands that reflects their understanding or agreement to a given idea or perspective. Five fingers means “I understand so well that I could teach the concept myself”; four fingers means “I have a good understanding”; three fingers means “I understand, but not clearly”; two fingers means “I have some questions”; one finger means “I’m confused”; and a fist means “I need another opportunity to learn this idea.”

You might check for understanding after much discussion of an idea saying, “Let’s do a fist-to-five,” and explain the categories. After surveying the student’s hands, you can make appropriate decisions about how much clarification is needed.

Class Historian

Purpose: To provide an outline record of topics and issues that have been examined along with learning activities, assignments, and resources so that students who were not in attendance have reliable information about what occurred in their absence. With a class historian, all students can check the accuracy of their own notes and records, and instructors can have a portfolio that reflects the course as a whole.

Time: As needed

Format: Individual students who rotate in and out of this assigned role.

Materials: An individual computer

Process

At the beginning of the course or institute, ask students to sign up to serve as the class historian on a specific date. The format of the class record (see below) can vary, but participants use their notes and materials provided by you as a guide. In some instances, a class editor reviews and compiles submissions for enhanced reliability and consistency.

CLASS RECORD

Date:

Topics Discussed:

Key Points:

Learning Activities:

Handouts:

Websites and Other Resources:

Upcoming Assignments and Due Dates:

Personal Comments:

For additional information, please contact _____ (name of class historian)

Class Review

Purpose: To provide group memory of and/or perspectives on topics and issues from the previous session and to support all students in verifying that they have a reliable record of prior knowledge on which to build.

Time: 15-30 minutes

Format: Triads and large group

Materials: Notes from the prior session

Process

At the beginning of a learning experience, each triad identifies two to three of the most important points, concepts, or ideas from the previous session. Then a reporter from each triad joins a panel of experts at the front of the room and presents a key point discussed in the reporter's triad. Two volunteer scribes take turns recording the contributions of the panel of experts so that there is written record to which any student may refer for additional information.

Class Agreements or Participation Guidelines

Purpose: To provide an environment for all students to feel respected by other students as well as by their teacher in order to offer their perspectives

Time: 30 minutes

Format: Individuals, triads, large group

Materials: Sample Class Agreements (below), note paper, pens

Process

Ask students to work individually to review sample guidelines and select, modify, and add other kinds of classroom agreements or guidelines that might help people construct a positive and productive learning environment. Ask students to begin by underlining on the Sample Class Agreements what they can agree to, modifying what they want to change, and adding additional possibilities. After students discuss their choices in triads, collect the Sample Class Agreements and make a large chart based on student's perspectives. At a follow-up class meeting, students put a star next to what they like, a checkmark next to what they can live with, and a question mark next to what they want the class to reconsider. Class agreements are carefully discussed to ensure mutual understanding of each item. For example, "listen carefully" does not necessarily mean "don't interrupt." Depending on the students' backgrounds, especially students in multicultural urban communities, interrupting can be a sign of active listening. However, often students from white, European American communities view interruption as impolite. These are the cultural norms that need to be discussed and negotiated.

SAMPLE CLASS AGREEMENTS

1. Listen carefully to others.
2. Share airtime.
3. Approach conflict as a problem that can be solved.
4. Speak from one's own experience, to say, for example, "I think..." or "In my experience I have found..." rather than generalizing one's experience to others, as in "People say..." or "We believe..."
5. Diminish the temptation to blame others by offering constructive insights and ideas related to a topic or issue.
6. Contribute to the learning of others in ways that are respectful and supportive

Some schools have schoolwide agreements to promote respect throughout the school. When this is the case, classroom agreements are often focused on collaborative projects and group work.

Note Cues

Purpose: To provide an opening for participants who are cautious about speaking in class, so they begin to hear their voices and participate in a discussion group

Time: Variable

Format: Individuals

Materials: 3 x 5 note cards with sample questions and comments.

Process

Note Cues tell students who are reluctant to speak publically *what* they might say in a class discussion, leaving them to think only about *when* they might say it. To encourage their participation, give students who seem consistently reluctant to speak publically a note card with questions or comments that might be made during class discussion. For example, a note card might have the question, "Would you please provide an example to clarify that point?" The person with the note card then decides at which point he or she will make this contribution to the discussion. The reading of teacher-prepared notes may seem like mindless parroting, but it can help students feel more competent by helping them practice situationally appropriate ways to participate in discussion. This strategy can also be designed to foster progressively greater forms of independence in question posing – for example, encouraging a student to ask a certain kind of question, such as a question that asks for another perspective (Wilson, 1995, p. 29).