



60 MINUTES

Circles of My Multicultural Self/Who are You, Really?

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This activity was adapted from Project VOYCE and was originally sourced from an activity by [Critical Multicultural Pavilion \(Facilitation guide\)](#)

Activity Rationale and Aims

Aims

1. Explore the self through critical reflection on identity and stereotypes
2. Disrupt the myth of neutrality in team building and partnership development

Rationale

This activity provides an arena for self-reflection on how our positionality impacts our role on a team and when interacting with others. It can be used during team building and partnership development and supports the aim of disrupting the myth of neutrality by using storytelling for social change. It creates a space to think more deeply about how identities impact partnership.

Activity Summary

Collaborators will have an opportunity to engage in tiered reflection, shifting from the individual level, to interpersonal, to a broader/societal lens. After identifying the key components comprising their sense of self, prompts then invite consideration of stereotypes and the consequences of not interrogating biases that go unchallenged.



In Person Steps

01.

Begin with an introduction to the concept of “positionality”:

- We all can recognize that we are ones who need to change and be part of the change we seek in the world. It is critically important to think about how our positionality impacts our interactions with other people.
- Before I define positionality for everyone, is there anyone here who has heard or knows what it is.
 - i. Positionality is a term used to describe how people are defined, that is “not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed” (Maher & Tetreault, 1994, p.164).
 - ii. Positionality is the social and political context that shapes your identity in terms of how your different categories, like race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status, intersect to create the unique nexus that is *you*. Positionality also describes how your identity influences and biases your understanding of and outlook on the world.
- Pause and check for understanding:
 - i. Can you please say 1-2 things that come up for you when you think about positionality?

- ii. How can the concept of positionality help us better understand how oppression came to be incorporated into the foundations of our social institutions?

02.

Introduce the activity: “Taking the time to reflect on the following questions and how they impact the ways we receive and engage with other people.”

03.

First set of INSTRUCTIONS (see slide 4)

- Place your name in the center circle.
- Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the surrounding circles. The circles that are closest to the core represent the aspects that are most central to your identity.
 - i. Ask collaborators to identify the most important dimensions of who they are (identity) that support their well-being, sharing possible categories of identity with them (funds of identity categories: geographic, practical, cultural, social, institutional).
- Think about a story associated with one of the identity aspects you listed in which you were:
 - i. Proud to be identified by that label/placed in that category.
 - ii. Uncomfortable/pained to be identified by that label/placed in that category.
- You will now have just about 3 minutes to fill out your own set of circles. Please let us know if you have any questions.



In Person Steps

04.

Think/Pair/Share Instructions (slide 5)

- Format for Partner Pair & Share
 - i. Each person will have 2-3 minutes to share their stories.
 - ii. Person A will go, followed immediately by Person B (do not comment or respond, yet!).
 - iii. Person B will share their story *without* framing it as a response to what they just heard.
 - vi. Partners will then have 4 minutes to discuss their stories.

05.

Come back together as a large group:

- ****COLLECTIVE BREATH MOMENT!**** Have the team listen to and participate together in the [3-Minute Breathing Space practice](#).
- Debrief the pair shares using the following questions:
 - i. What were some commonalities and differences between your stories?
 - ii. Between stories of being proud and in pain?
 - iii. What was it like to be the speaker?
The listener?

06.

Final portion instructions:

- Ask collaborators to take another look at their circles and reflect on the question,

- i. What stereotypes are associated with the different identifiers you listed about yourself? Remind them that, “While all stereotypes are generalizations, not all generalizations are stereotypes. Stereotypes are widely circulated oversimplifications of a group of people, while generalizations can be based more on personal experience, not a widely-accepted factor” (Nittle, 2020). Take a moment to jot down 1-2 stereotypes that may be applied to your identity characteristics.

- Drawing connections

- i. It is important to consider how our perception of how others perceive us can impact our sense of self and our personal narrative. To wrap up this activity, it is time to reclaim the narrative and flip the script!

- Please take 2 minutes to reflect on the stereotypes you have personally experienced about one dimension of your identity that fails to describe you accurately, and complete the sentence, “I am a/an X, but I am NOT X.”

*Note, this is about sharing what stereotypes you have personally experienced, rather than what stereotypes you are aware of (to avoid listing stereotypes related to different identities).

07.

Group Debrief

- Invite collaborators to share their “flip the script” sentence.
- Ask “What is coming up for you in this moment - any ‘ah-ha’ moment(s) you wish to share?”



Facilitator Preparation

IN PERSON MATERIALS

N/A

HANDOUTS OR SLIDES

[Example slides](#)

Facilitation Tips

- Facilitator(s) should model their own circle briefly while collaborators populate their own.
- Facilitators should reflect on how they will model engagement prior to facilitation.
- It is most effective if facilitators also engage as active collaborators. When facilitators engage vulnerably and authentically, collaborators are more likely to feel open to do the same.
- It is crucial to invite silence and reflection.
- Encourage the acceptance of multiple truths and the use of “I statements”.
- Encourage collaborators to practice validating, encouraging, admiring, and appreciating what your partner shared.
- Practice stopping to take a deep breath and re-center.
- SET TIMER: 2 + 2 + 4 = 8 minutes in partner pair breakouts.
- If possible, give reminders to switch at 2 minute and 4 minute mark.



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Modifications and Virtual Adaptations:

- Extension focused on diving deeper into stereotypes (30 minutes):
 - i. Debrief Questions (could be presented as an individual writing activity or group discussion):
 - How much of affirming what we are involves saying what we are not to others, to deflect stereotypes?
 - How do the dimensions of your identity that you chose as important differ from the dimensions other people use to make judgments about you?
- Did anybody hear somebody challenge a stereotype that you once bought into? If so, what?
- Where do stereotypes come from? How are they connected to the kinds of socialization that make us complicit with oppressive conditions?
- How can we cultivate groups and communities where we cultivate more moments where we feel proud of our identities?

Example from the field

This activity has been done in a wide variety of contexts, with varying ages, professional roles and experiences, and identity statuses. One example of how it has been used is when introducing graduate students to research and supporting them to explore their positionality and how it is made to be consequential depending on the social, relational, temporal, and political contexts. In this context, students considered what

elements of their positionality may matter more or less, depending on the context of collaboration and research. They reflected on how their positionality could generate bias and unique perspectives in relation to a variety of projects. Students reflected that this was a particularly powerful activity to engage in at the start of a research project as it helped them be aware of how they were entering into partnership.



Commitments to Equity

A key condition for equity is recognizing our own positionality, how it shapes who we are, the power we can exercise in different contexts, and how others see us. Positionality is a resource for collaboration in many respects: as a source of knowledge about experiences that are relevant in design, for example, and as a basis for securing resources needed to carry out work.

Our positionalities also include our funds of identity and can be a resource for our own well-being (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). People bring ways of caring for others and themselves that are specific to the families and communities they are part of. Eliciting how people attend to and take care of one another's well-being is part of this activity.



Additional Reading

Esteban-Guitart, M., Lalueza, J. L., Zhang-Yu, C., & Llopart, M. (2019). Sustaining students' cultures and identities. A qualitative study based on the funds of knowledge and identity approaches. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3400.

Gutiérrez, K. D., & Rogoff, B. (2003). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher*, 32(5), 19-25.

Louis, K. S., & Barton, A. C. (2002, September). Tales from the science education crypt: A critical reflection of positionality, subjectivity, and reflexivity in research. *Forum Qualitative Social Research/Sozialforschung*, 3(3).

Nittle, N. K. (2020, February 4). What Is a Stereotype? ThoughtCo. <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-the-meaning-of-stereotype-2834956>

Works Cited

Esteban-Guitart, M., & Moll, L. C. (2014). Funds of identity: A new concept based on the funds of knowledge approach. *Culture & Psychology*, 20(1), 31-48.

Maher, F. A., & Tetreault, M. K. T. (2001). *The feminist classroom: Dynamics of gender, race, and privilege* (Expand ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

