

What Culture is ?

Key message

By observing the construction of our identity we will thus verify that either culture nor cultural identity is static and polarised (you are- you are not) as defended by extremist positions, but changeable, dynamic and plural.

Key words: cultural identity, sense of belonging, cultural plurality

Summary

Culture is neither static nor changeless and it is necessary to understand that diversity is one of the key factors in its development. Each person is a melt of his/her culture (or cultures), own characteristics and experiences and the fact of being aware about our own plurality will improve common knowledge about the group and its diversity.

Module	Group size	Group age	Duration
• Prevention • Exit strategies	• individual	• 12 - 15 • 16 - 19 • 20 - 24	• 30 min • 45 min • 1 hour

Purpose

- Be conscious that identity is multiple, complex and changeable.
- Improve common knowledge about the group and its diversity.
- Reinforce the feeling of belonging to the group.
- Know and think about concepts related with culture and cultural identity.

Description

Step 1: Brainstorm to introduce the concept of culture. Complete its definition and emphasize that there are visible cultural aspects (such as food, clothing, monuments, etc.) and not visible (values, customs, traditions, etc.).

Step 2: Collect examples of cultural elements that have been imported (e.g.: hamburger, potatoes, coffee, etc.) or exported (potato omelette, pizza, ...) to other cultures. Depending on the size of the group you can perform a dynamic where a ball is passed randomly while the participants from one side have to say aspects imported and those from the other side aspects exported. Emphasize that culture is dynamic, changing and is made up of other cultures.

Step 3: Put participants in pairs or in small groups (3-4 persons) and let them compare the answers. Make a pool with the whole group. Here are some questions that can help to lead the reflection:

- *Do you feel identified with the same culture?*
- *Have you found more differences or similarities between the things you like and dislike?*
- *Are they visible (e.g. festivities, art, food, places, etc.) or invisibles (e.g. solidarity among the people,*

respect for freedom, etc.) cultural aspects?

- *So how would you define CULTURE? Can you share a culture for a matter of religion? of nationality? or for an ethnic reason?*

Step 4: Now ask participants to fulfil individually the attached worksheet "Like an onion" (see handouts) in which they have to note, in order of priority, the main aspects that define their identity. Indications for participants:

- Did you ever heard about "persons are like onions"? (You can use as an example the dialogue of the animation movie "Shrek" to make it more attractive: *"Ogres have layers. Onions have layers. You get it? We both have layers."*)
- Imagine that you are like an onion, with many layers. In each one you will find the most important things in your life, especially in the core. Note in order of priority which are the most important things for you? (related with your family relations, hobbies, place of birth, religion, etc.)
- **Optional:** - If the group has a good knowledge about what culture is and the participants know each other, the exercise "Like an onion" can be made more specific by taking as a criterion some cultural aspects that participants like or believe that influence them. The objective is to compare how each person creates its cultural identity in a peculiar way, with different aspects and customs, even if they are included within the same culture.

Step 5: Once the exercise done, ask them first to share their impressions in pairs/small groups and then pool the results. Here are some questions that can help to lead the reflection:

- *Which similarities and differences have you found in the aspects used by the participants to define their identity?*
- *Do you think this hierarchy is unchangeable?*
- *Which are the motivations for giving priority to an aspect more than another?*
- *How our cultural identity is constructed? Is it a social process?*
- *Can a person feel part of different cultures? (e.g. a Spaniard-Jordanian, a Gypsy Evangelist, a Muslim Romanian, etc.?)*
- *Therefore, according to you what is CULTURAL IDENTITY? Help the group establish a definition.*
- *Cultural identity:* Cultural identity is shaped by ourselves, taking those cultural aspects that we like and discarding others (eg customs, values, festivities, etc.). Our cultural identity assimilates us to other people of the same culture (we share a language or values or a way of dressing, etc.) but also differentiates us from them as we do not share all the elements or in the same extent as they do.

Materials needed

Paper, pen, handouts "Like an onion".

Methodology

Discussion board

Advice for Trainer

- The dynamiser person must have knowledge about what culture is and what aspects make it. Beyond deepening on this concept is to clarify that the way in which we identify with the same culture is very different from one person to another. Far beyond deepening this concept, It is

a question of clarifying that the way in which we identify with a specific culture is very different from one person to another.

Source / Literature

Adapted from Escuela de Paz (2003-2004). “¿Cómo nos relacionamos con la ciudad?” Propuestas para una convivencia pacífica. *III Audiencia Pública a los chicos y chicas de San Sebastián* San Sebastián.

Handouts

“LIKE AN ONION”



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