

DEFINING CULTURE

GOALS:

- To define and identify the elements of culture.
- To explore our similarities and differences.
- To value diversity.



RATIONALE:

Although it is difficult to define culture, it is important to explore how we individually and collectively explain this term. Defining and understanding what we mean by the term 'culture', helps us to value our own distinct identity as well as appreciate and value others.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart, markers, pens, pencils, paper and a definition of culture written on the flipchart - see Theory Box.

METHOD:

Warm up: Tiny Talents

Divide participants into dyads. Explain that they are to teach their partner something new, preferably something that reflects a skill or new information about their culture. Some examples might be to teach an expression or saying from another language, a dance step, a game, a song, describe a custom, preparation of a food or a special festival. Allow three minutes, then have them reverse roles.

In the large group, ask each participant to teach or explain to the rest of the group what they learned from their partner.

Exercise 1: Exploring Similarities and Differences

Divide participants into groups of four or five. Instruct the groups to choose a recorder and list as many responses that they can think of to the following questions.

- In what ways are people basically alike?
- In what ways are people different from one another?

Ask the recorders to read out their responses and briefly ask for comments from the group. Explain that some of the ideas generated in this exercise will be helpful as we look to define culture.

Questions to Consider:

- What characteristics make groups different from each other? These could include language, religion, values, clothing, music, gender roles, etc.
- In what ways are groups similar? (Many of the responses can be the same as the differences.)

Theory: See Theory Box

Exercise 2: In Search of a Definition

After revealing the definition of culture as given in the Theory Box, ask the group to come up with their own definition of culture. Flipchart their responses and explore similarities and differences compared to the formal definition. Discuss that there is no “hard and fast” definition and discuss why it is sometimes difficult to state a concrete definition of the term ‘culture’.

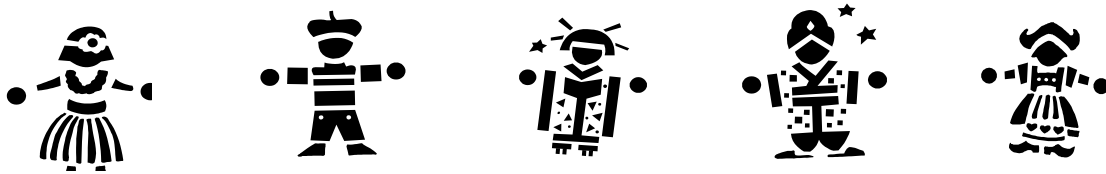
In preparation for Exercise 3, have participants name as many different cultural groups as they can, including their own. Flipchart their responses and post the list.

Exercise 3: Cultural Differences - So What?

Divide participants into groups of 4 to discuss the questions listed below and ask them to report back to the large group. Alternatively, you may wish to facilitate a discussion in the large group.

Questions to Consider:

- What purpose does it serve to identify cultures and cultural groups?
- Which, if any, of the groups mentioned would you identify yourself with? If none, which cultural group do you consider yourself to be a member of?
- Would you prefer other terms to cultural group such as ethnic group, racial group, or no label at all? Why?
- What does it mean to you that you are a member of a particular group?



Exercise 4: Valuing Our Differences

Divide participants into groups of 4. Have each individual list five characteristics that are unique or make them different from the other members of their small group. Then have each person choose one of their unique characteristics and share in their group. Ask participants to consider how they use or could use that quality to contribute in a positive way to their community.

Have groups share what they discussed in the large group.

EVALUATION:

THEORY BOX

DEFINITIONS:

Culture: The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious or social group.

Examples include: Rites of passage such as birth, marriage and burial traditions, styles of clothing, types of food eaten, language and literature, religious observations, artistic expressions including music and art, forms of architecture, etc.

- It is difficult to have a concrete definition of culture because the characteristics we use to denote cultural differences are not universally applicable.
- Although there are a variety of reasons why we identify cultures and cultural groups, one purpose is that such identification is a way of indicating that groups of people are different from each other.

Valuing Difference: Individual or interpersonal awareness and acceptance of differences (gender, race, values, styles, culture, etc.)

Valuing Diversity: A philosophy involving the principle of inclusiveness; the utilization of people to their full potential.