Developing cultural sensitivity in the classroom

This resource provides a short learning sequence that focuses on developing cultural sensitivity and intercultural understanding. It incorporates practical strategies that were presented by Dagmar Turnidge during a workshop at the National Values Education Conference in Canberra on 30 April and 1 May 2009. Dagmar currently works with pre-service teachers in the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne as Lecturer and Humanities Learning Area Co-ordinator and Clinical Specialist in the Master of Teaching. She was actively involved in the *Harmony through Understanding* project in 2002. The first activity is adapted from the Edchange website and the iceberg activity is adapted from the Peace Corps website: both sites are listed in the references.

Background

On 5 December 2008, the Australian Education Ministers launched the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. The preamble to this declaration, which sets the agenda for Australian education over the next decade, notes that:

As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society — a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia’s Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation’s history, present and future.

In translating this aspiration into a goal for the future, the declaration notes that all Australian governments and all school sectors must:

- ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity.

The learning activities presented in this resource will encourage students to reflect on their own identity, develop a greater awareness of the many factors that contribute to the cultural identity of any person, and challenge stereotypes that they may hold. These learning outcomes are a practical step towards achieving the goals from the Melbourne Declaration.
The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) has been involved with values education and civics and citizenship education over several years. The issue of developing intercultural understanding has been explored through national conferences in these areas (managed by ACSA for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) each year since 2004. ACSA also managed the National Showcase Seminar: *Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education* in 2006, and is currently working with the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia (NCEIS) to present a series of professional workshops for teachers titled *Education with Muslims: Moving Forward*.

**Learning outcomes**

Students will:
- develop a greater understanding of their cultural identity
- explore the many dimensions of the concept of culture
- challenge their thinking to uncover assumptions about cultural stereotypes
- analyse their thinking and articulate reasons behind their conclusions
- share their ideas with the class and the wider community.

**References**

Circles of my multicultural self — www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html
Culture is like an Iceberg — www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/lessonplans
Making multicultural Australia — www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au
http://www.greaterdandenong.com/Resources/SiteDocuments/sid1_doc37407.pdf
Circles of myself activity

Give each student a copy of the reproducible worksheet *Circles of myself*. Ask them to complete the worksheet by writing their name in the centre circle, and then writing a word to describe some part of their identity in each of the other circles. These descriptive words should relate to things that they consider to be important about themselves, and can include any aspect of their lives. Give the students examples of words that you would include about you e.g. teacher, female, quilter, Geelong supporter, film buff, cyclist, mother, Chinese-Australian, Christian.

Divide the class into small groups. Ask each student to share a story with their group about a time when they felt proud to identify themselves with one of the descriptive words that they have used. Students should then each share a story about a time when it was painful to be identified with one of the descriptive words they have used. You may like to start this activity by providing an example of each type of story. ‘I felt really proud to be a quilter when I saw how many people came to our quilt exhibition — people spent lots of time looking at our quilts and obviously enjoyed them’; and ‘I felt really bad about being a cyclist when a group of my friends were talking about how angry they get sharing the road with bike riders, because the bike riders make it dangerous for drivers’.

Ask each student to think of a stereotype about one of the groups they have identified with on the *Circles of myself* worksheet that is not true for them. Provide an example from your own life, such as ‘I am a cyclist but I do not disrupt traffic because I only ride on roads where there is a cycle lane’. Allow time for each student to complete the sentence ‘I am a/an ............ but I am NOT a/an ............’, and then invite students to share their sentences with the class. Make sure that students listen respectfully, as individuals may reveal sensitive personal information. Encourage the class to discuss the shared responses by asking students questions such as:

* Are the words you chose to describe yourself different to the words others use to describe you?
* Did anyone challenge a stereotype that you had believed before now?
* Where do stereotypes come from?
* How can we eliminate stereotypes?

Culture is like an iceberg activity

Remind students that a metaphor can help us to understand complex ideas. Ask students what they know about the size and shape of icebergs, and establish that only about one-eighth of an iceberg is visible above the water; the rest is below. Explain that culture is similar to an iceberg in that the visible aspects of culture are only a small part of a much larger whole, and we need to learn more about a culture before we can understand the parts that are not visible. Distribute the *Features of culture* reproducible worksheet to each student. This activity asks students to think of examples of different aspects of culture. Alternatively you can complete this worksheet as a class using a Smartboard.
Divide the students into small groups, and give each group a copy of the reproducible worksheet *Iceberg*. Ask students to decide where each of the examples from the *Features of culture* worksheet should be placed on the drawing of the iceberg; those that are visible should be listed above the water line and those that are not visible should be listed below the water line. Do the first few examples with the class e.g. styles of dress are visible; beliefs about hospitality cannot be directly observed. (In the list of features, the numbers that should appear below the water are 3–5, 7–9, 15–17, 21–22, and 24–26.) Ask students to explain why they placed particular features below the water line. As a class, discuss those features below the line that might influence any feature/s above the water line e.g. ideas about modesty might affect styles of dress; religious beliefs might influence holiday celebrations. *Culture is Like an Iceberg* comes from *Building Bridges: A Peace Corps Classroom Guide to Cross-Cultural Understanding* and can be downloaded from http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/publications/bridges/index.cfm.

Ask each student to write a paragraph in response to the following question: We are different in some ways, but what are the values that we share?

### Celebration calendar activity

To encourage students to relate the concept of culture to their own lives, ask them to complete the reproducible worksheet *Celebrations*. In this activity, students can reflect on what we can learn about ourselves and others by looking at the ways we celebrate. Encourage students to think beyond religious festivals such as Christmas, Diwali, Ramadan and Rosh Hashanah. National events such as Australia Day and popular culture events such as football finals should also be included if they are celebrated in the community.

When students have completed the *Celebrations* worksheet, develop a class list of events that are celebrated in your community (you may choose to include celebrations beyond your community). Mark each event on a calendar so that this list can become a guide for the class to develop a calendar of celebrations. Divide the class into 12 groups and give each group responsibility for developing one month of the calendar. Before each group creates their page, ask them to:

- research what happens during each celebration/festival in their month
- find out what the significance if the celebration is
- design a symbol or illustration to represent what is special about each celebration
- design a page and use the symbols to mark the celebrations in their month.

On a map of the world mark the countries from which the festivals originated. This could be included as the back page of the calendar to illustrate classroom or community diversity.

Explore ways in which copies of the calendar your class has created could be reproduced to share it with your community e.g. print copies in the local library/community centre, electronic copy on school website. Make a plan for how you could achieve this goal and then do it.

This calendar idea was inspired by *Harmony Through Understanding* (2001), a joint project of the Australian College of Educators (Victorian Chapter), in alliance with IARTV, the Rosencrantz Centre, Bialik College and the Australian Principal’s Centre; and the Peace Tree website http://www.peacetreeday.com/documents/168-179.pdf
Circles of myself
Features of culture

For each feature of culture, think of one example that could be applied to people in Australia e.g. hugs or handshakes for ‘ways of greeting people’.

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<td>Styles of dress</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Ways of greeting people</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Beliefs about hospitality</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Importance of time</td>
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<td>Beliefs about child raising</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Attitudes about personal space /privacy</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Beliefs about the responsibilities of children and teens</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Gestures to show you understand what has been told to you</td>
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<td>11.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Music</td>
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<td>Dancing</td>
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## Features of culture

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<td>Celebrations</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Concept of fairness</td>
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<td>Ideas about modesty</td>
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<td>Greetings</td>
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<td>Facial expressions and hand gestures</td>
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<td>Religious beliefs</td>
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<td>Religious rituals</td>
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<td>Rules of polite behaviour</td>
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<td>Attitude toward age</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>The role of family</td>
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Based on *Building Bridges: A Peace Corps Classroom Guide to Cross-Cultural Understanding*, Coverdell World Wise Schools
DEVELOPING CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

ICEBERG

Surface culture

Deep culture
Celebrations

Focus: You and your family
Describe your favourite family tradition.

________________________________________________________________________

Describe how this tradition began. If you don’t know, ask other members of your family.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Why is this family tradition important to you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Think of all of the events that your family celebrates. Which one is your favourite? Why?

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________________________________________________________________________

-focus: Beyond you
Write down any celebrations that are held by other families or cultural groups within your community, or in other places in Australia. Beside each celebration write a brief description of what you know about it.

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