

‘WALK IN THEIR SHOES’ – RAISING AWARENESS OF BEING A ‘FOREIGNER’

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Target audience

- Pre-service teachers
 - Primary teachers
 - Secondary teachers
- In-service teachers
 - Primary teachers
 - Secondary teachers
- Other situations
 - Staff workers at youth centers

Itineraries

- Identity exploration
- Exploring attitudes towards languages and cultures

Abstract:

This purpose of the activities is to develop awareness of pluricultural issues and prepare teachers for their role in the multicultural classroom. The seven activities/worksheets call for personal reflection and sharing of opinions and experiences with co-students. Participants begin by exploring their own identity and then reflect on what it is like to be a foreigner or an ‘outsider’ in their country. Another activity uses literature to further the reflection by giving the participants an opportunity to identify with a character from a story who is dealing with the experience of being new or different in a cultural situation. This is followed with a look at how the media and popular culture present hidden attitudes and possible prejudice toward people from different ethnic backgrounds. Two activities help participants to personalize the discussion by interviewing a foreigner and collecting their newly-gained insights into a form of creative expression, such as a story, poem, or role-play. The set of activities conclude with an evaluation and plan of action.

Rationale

Teachers play a key role in the personal and social development of young people. Today’s society is one of increasing interaction and mobility between peoples of diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and customs. It is essential that teachers are aware of pluricultural and Plurilingual issues and are capable of effectively dealing with these issues at the school and personal level. This set of activities utilizes personal reflection and pair and group work to broaden the participants’ perspectives, promote open communication and understanding, and prepare them for their role in facilitating students’ development of pluricultural competence.

Personal and social dimensions

- Observing the linguistic and cultural diversity of contexts and individuals
- Observing how educators can influence the attitudes of learners towards languages, those who speak them and their culture, as well as their motivation and curiosity with regard to languages

- Recognizing the linguistic and cultural complexity of individual and collective identities
- Combating exclusion and linguistic and cultural discrimination while embracing the opportunities of a life together in society
- Having confidence in one's professional ability to develop educational approaches in which taking account of linguistic and cultural diversity is a reality

Professional dimensions

- Being aware of the need for a new linguistic and cultural education capable of promoting plurilingualism and pluriculturalism
- Reflecting on the new roles and functions of the language teacher as educator

Worksheet 1: Who am i?

Timing: 30 minutes

Material required: writing paper or journal

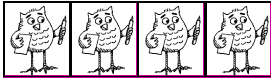
Objective: To reflect on the idea of identity – national, cultural, and personal identity



Step 1: Think about the following questions having to do with ‘national identity’. You

may choose to answer them in writing, for example, in a journal.

- Is there such a thing as a ‘common Icelandic national identity’? If you think so, how would you describe it? This would include defining how Icelanders normally see themselves as a people, common characteristics, values, beliefs, etc.
- How do you see yourself in terms of this common national identity? Do you fit the description or are you at odds with it in significant ways?



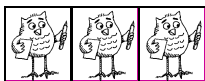
Step 2: Discuss your ideas in the group.

Worksheet 2: What is it like to be a foreigner?

Timing: 45 minutes

Material required: writing paper or journal

Objective: To reflect on the idea of being a foreigner or an 'outsider'



Step 1: Think about your own experiences of living abroad or associating with

foreigners and share them with the group.

- Have you ever lived abroad or been an 'outsider' entering into a community in which you were different from those already there?
- Do you know or have a personal connection with any foreigners living in your country? What do you think it may feel like for foreigners to be a newcomer to the 'new' country or community?



Step 2: Reflect further on the above questions in your journal. If you have not lived

abroad, you may choose to write about some personal experiences of being new or different in a social situation.

Worksheet 3: Reflection through literature

Timing: 30 minutes

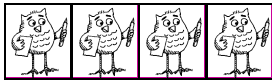
Material required: literary text, e.g. *Who's Irish* by Jen Gish (Vintage 1999)
writing paper or journal

Objective: To reflect further by reading literary texts which deal with experiences of being new in a community and an outsider in a cultural situation



Step 1: Before class, students read short stories that look at the challenges faced by

individuals when they move to new countries or interact with other cultural groups. A possible suggestion is the story *Who's Irish* by Jen Gish (Vintage 1999). This story relates the experience of a Chinese woman who has immigrated to the United States and the cultural and generational conflicts she experiences in her interaction with her daughter and granddaughter who have been raised in the new country. It pinpoints some of the difficulties of assimilating into a society with very different values and beliefs.



Step 2: Students prepare a short presentation of the stories they have

read and discuss their reactions to them in the group.



Optional step: Students can read the story *Who's Irish* and write a short reaction paper or journal entry. The following questions can help them in their reflection:

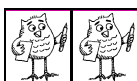
- Describe the relationships between the grandmother, mother and granddaughter. How would you define the conflicts that arise between them?
- Compare the grandmother to the mother and granddaughter. How do their behavior and belief systems differ? In what ways does the grandmother have trouble 'fitting in'?
- Note the use of language in the story. Why do you think the author chose to use incorrect grammar and syntax?
- What do you think about the role of the daughter and how she feels in the position she is placed in?
- What is the significance of being a 'permanent resident'?
- What does the grandmother learn in the story?

Worksheet 4: Attitudes seen in the media and popular culture

Timing 45 minutes

Material required: newspapers, magazines, and web sites
writing paper or journal

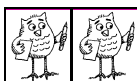
Objective: To explore local media and popular culture for evidence of social responses to newcomers or foreigners living in a new country.



Step 1: Before class, students look for articles, interviews or news items in the local

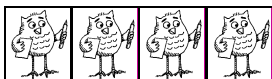
media which illustrate attitudes or reactions towards newcomers and/or foreigners in your country. Optionally, the teacher can provide examples from the media and popular culture for students to read. The attitudes could be hidden rather than openly stated or conscious. It might be necessary to read carefully and probe into the text to find a message that is not seen at first glance.

Popular culture includes such things as music lyrics, film, web sites and chat groups. Make a list of songs or films which portray attitudes towards foreigners or minority groups in your country.



Step 2: Written report and oral presentation. The findings should be summarized in

a written report and orally presented to the group. The report should include a description of the types of evidence collected, the social responses and attitudes portrayed in the evidence, and the students' reactions to them. Students can do the research work and written report in pairs.



Optional step: Before (or after) students do the media research, the

teacher trainer could organize a visit to or a presentation by someone from an Immigrants Center or Intercultural Center, in order to provide students with information regarding immigrant issues and dealing with prejudice. Students can react to the visit/lecture in their journal.

Worksheet 5: Interview a foreigner or 'outsider'

Timing: 45 minutes

Material required: writing paper or journal

Objective: To personalize the discussion about being a foreigner or different through real-life narratives

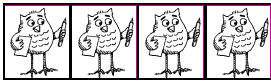


Step 1: Students make contact with and interview a foreigner or immigrant living in your

country. Encourage the person to tell his or her own story and talk about experiences in the new country. Avoid asking leading questions or ones which can be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. Keep in mind that the person may be reluctant to criticize or give negative comments about the host country.

It is best to record the interview if possible. After the interview, summarize the main points and issues touched upon in a written report. Students should also include their personal reactions to the interview; both the interviewing process and what came out of it.

Students can also reflect on their reactions to the interviews in their journals.



Step 2: Students share the personal experiences of the foreigners with

the group and discuss their reactions to them.

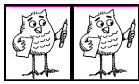
Worksheet 6: 'Walk in their shoes'

Timing: 60 minutes

Objective: to develop and share newly-gained insights through a form of creative and physical expression



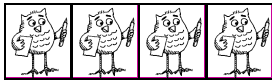
or



Step 1: During this set of lessons, students have read stories, looked at the

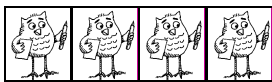
media, explored their own feelings, and talked with a person about the experience of being a newcomer in a foreign country. Hopefully, the experiences and insights accumulated through the lessons have given the students a new perspective on what it may feel like to be a foreigner or immigrant in your country. In this activity, students are asked to put themselves in the shoes of an imagined foreigner living in your country and present their insights through a first person perspective. (This means deciding for themselves the gender, age, family status, area of origin, etc. of the imagined foreigner.)

Students may work together if desired and can choose the method and genre of the presentation, be it poetry, storytelling, drama, video or other visual form.



Step 2: Students share their first person narratives with the group and

provide each other with feedback.



Step 3: 'Follow the leader' – This group activity is a physical

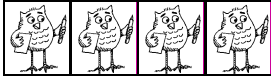
representation of having to behave like others. One person is designated as the leader. He/she leads the group through the classroom, choosing his/her own way of walking or moving. All the other students must follow the leader and copy his/her movements. Students take turns in being the leader and requiring the others to conform to their choice of movements. After the exercise, students discuss and reflect on the experiences of having to conform and trying to fit in.

Worksheet 7: Evaluation

Timing: 30 minutes

Material required: writing paper or journal

Objective: to conclude the set of lessons, evaluate the outcomes, and apply them to teacher training



Step 1: A final discussion – evaluation session. Students and teacher

reflect together upon the outcomes of the lessons, what has been gained, and what possible steps may follow. The discussion should look at how and/or whether students' attitudes have changed. Have they gained new perspectives? Do they have a better understanding of multicultural issues? Students can use their journals to see and reflect upon how their ideas have changed and developed over time.

The classroom implications of the lessons should also be shared and explored. Have the lessons changed the students' views towards teaching or the teacher's role? Students should discuss how the activities can be used in their own teaching and what steps they can take to increase the pluricultural awareness of their own pupils. In that regard, students can ask themselves the following questions:

- What can I do as an individual?
- What can the school do?
- What can society do?

The lesson can conclude with students sharing their answers in the group and the teacher providing them with positive feedback and recognition of their work.

Assessment

The assessment methods that are most appropriate to the set of activities are self-assessment and continuous and/or portfolio assessment. The activities call for extensive self-reflection through the journal, discussion questions, and reaction papers. Students are expected to successfully express their thoughts in the group discussions and oral presentations. Finally, they are expected to produce a creative piece of work encapsulating the insights gained through the activities. Assessment criteria should be developed with the students which are in line with the objectives of the particular activity and focus on important aspects of their work. Some examples of assessment criteria could be:

- critical and personal reflection
- depth of thought
- clarity of expression
- creativity, originality

Assessment should also take into account the learning process and personal development of the individuals during the time frame of activities. Student portfolios, along with the written journals, are particularly well-suited for that purpose.

Notes for teacher educators:

Worksheet 1

The initial written reflection and discussion serves as a starting point, one to be compared and contrasted with students' final assessment of the insights they have gained through the entire set of lessons, both for the students themselves to reflect upon as well as the teacher. It also maps students' previous experiences, and thus gives the teacher a greater chance to meet them where they are in terms of knowledge and experience.

Keeping a journal is an important element of the lessons because it enables students to 'think on paper' and develop and discover new knowledge. It also helps them to capture the total experience, reflect upon it and develop a new awareness, particularly if they are not happy with what they have begun to see.

A journal can be an integral part of a portfolio kept by the student during the period of lessons for collecting materials and ideas, and facilitating and documenting personal development.

Worksheet 2

Sharing of personal stories of being foreign or different in a situation serves to show how common the experience is. Everyone has been an 'outsider' in some sense of the word. By sharing their experiences, students gain a sense of belonging to a group and learn to empathize with others.

Worksheet 3

The reading of literary texts can provide students with a deeply engaging experience and give them an opportunity to identify with a character in a certain situation, imaginatively being in the character's shoes and trying on his/her thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the exposure to literature can help students imagine different ways of being in the world, and thus help enlarge their cultural models to include more diversity and different ways of being.

Worksheet 4

After the discussion and sharing of insights into literature (Worksheet 3), students should be more aware of and sensitized to issues having to do with foreigners. They should be more capable of searching the media and popular culture for clues about hidden attitudes and possible prejudice towards people from different ethnic backgrounds. This task gives students the opportunity to see things from a different perspective and notice things which they may not notice on an everyday basis, thus uncovering subtle instances of racism and discrimination.

Worksheet 5

By hearing stories of immigrants' actual experiences, students can connect the attitudes and prejudices seen in the media (Worksheet 4) to real people with real feelings, and they become more personalized and urgent to them. The stories can also raise students' awareness and help them to critically reflect on their own lives and community. The activity also shows the variety of experiences and individual complexities of being a foreigner. The foreigner is not just a part of a group of people, but a unique individual with unique life experiences.

Worksheet 6

Through imaginative empathy, students create a voice of an imaginary person, based on the insights they have gained, and present the created feelings and experiences of that voice to others. When students 'try on other's' points of view' it helps bring the issues closer to home and underlines that what they have experienced are individual human insights, not research findings. What better way to develop a deep and lasting understanding of someone else's life than to step into his/her shoes and try on his/her voice?

The 'follow the leader' exercise, on the other hand, serves to remind us of the restrictions that new and different situations often place on us and that newcomers or outsiders are expected to conform to existing norms.

Supplementary materials

Who's Irish, Jen Gish, Vintage 1999