

ACTIVITY 24: WHAT WOULD YOU GIVE UP?

Overview of the activity

Abandoning one's culture to assimilate into a new country can be difficult. This exercise takes participants on a reflective journey to explore how they would feel about giving up elements of their cultural heritage.

Objectives

- Get to know each other (if you opt for the first phase)
- Reflect on our own attitudes and relationships to elements of our cultural heritage
- Explore how we would feel if we were required to change elements of our cultural heritage
- Stimulate understanding of migrants who do not wish to 'assimilate' or abandon elements of their cultural heritage

Duration (in minutes)	Min/max number of participants	Room/space requirements
60 minutes	• Recommended: 10 – 16 • Minimum: 6 • Maximum: 18	The activity is best carried out with chairs and tables to write at, but participants should also be able to move around if Step 2 is included

Minimum knowledge requirements of participants	Materials needed	
In its present form, the activity requires writing. Oral adaptations can be envisaged but are not described here. Some understanding of the concept of ‘assimilation’ and the prevailing national practices and approaches to acculturation may strengthen the integration of the learning outcomes.	Several small (about 10 x 15 cm) pieces of coloured paper for each participant Pen for each participant A hat or basket to collect the ‘heritage onions’ Projector (optional) to project the questions. As participants may need different amounts of time to answer the question, having them projected helps them keep track.	Prepare small pieces of paper of three different colours that you will distribute to participants (e.g. each participant should receive a yellow, a green and a pink piece of paper). Carefully consider the questions that are proposed below, check if any of them could be challenging to understand or to respond to for your participants. Select 6–9 questions in total that you consider the most relevant, i.e. 2–3 questions in each category. You can adjust the list of questions according to your needs. (If you keep the question on clothes, please also keep the one on what parts of the body to cover.) Familiarize yourself with the concepts of assimilation and acculturation.

Instructions

1. **ANSWERING QUESTIONS.** Tell participants you will hand out different coloured pieces of paper, and you will ask them to answer specific questions on the paper of different colours. We propose you proceed in the following order: On the yellow piece of paper, invite participants to answer the five questions below:

- *What places are very important to you?*
- *What language(s) do you speak well enough to express yourself clearly?*
- *What are your favourite foods?*
- *How do you like to receive guests?*
- *What are your favourite clothes?*

On the green piece of paper, invite participants to answer the three questions below:

- *What is politeness for you?*
- *What parts of your body do you want to cover in public?*
- *What personal traits are you most proud of?*

On the pink piece of paper, invite participants to answer the four questions below:

- *What are the most important celebrations for you in the year?*
- *What do you consider inedible?*
- *What do you believe is the meaning of life or what do you think it is about?*
- *What are your three most important values?*

2. **FINDING EACH OTHER.** Invite participants to create a ball of their three pieces of paper ('heritage onions'), putting the pink piece in the centre and the yellow piece as the most external layer. Collect these balls in a hat or basket. Once all the balls are collected, invite everybody to take one and make sure that it is not their own ball. Ask them to read the answers and try to identify the person who may have written them. If they manage to do so, they can give the ball back to the author. If you wish, in the group discussion you can also ask whether some questions were easier/more difficult to answer, or whether something surprised them.
3. **DEFINING HERITAGE.** Depending on whether it has been done before, at this point, you can give a definition of 'cultural heritage' that encompasses all the elements listed in the answers. You can make the distinction between material and immaterial heritage.
4. **ANALYSING ANSWERS.** Ask participants whether they see differences in the questions asked for the yellow, green and pink pieces of paper? Indeed, at first glance, we move from a more superficial to a deeper layer. Ask them if they agree with this perception. Explore together: what may seem superficial layers are very much connected to deeper layers (i.e. how we receive guests is connected to what we think of politeness and respect, which may be connected to important values). Similarly, how we dress is connected to perceptions of public and non-public parts of our body. The important element of this phase is to note these connections across different layers. This will be important in the next step.
5. **CONSIDERING CHANGE.** Now invite participants to imagine they have become migrants in a cultural environment that is very different from theirs. Go through each answer together and consider how easy they would find it to change. For example, how easy would it be to live without our 'favourite places'? How easy would it be to replace them with new places? Ask the same questions for food, clothes, etc. Move from the yellow to the green to the pink answers. Also explore how they think they would respond if they felt pressure to change from their host society. Ask them if it would be easier to change if members of the host society gave explanations of the meaning of the new practices they should adopt.
6. **CONNECTING TO ASSIMILATION.** To conclude, you should return to the concept of assimilation, understood as a change of cultural patterns and habits. Depending on where you are, the official approach may be more or less oriented towards assimilation. But even where assimilation is not a state policy, it may be present as a general social expectation – 'When in Rome do as the Romans' is an idea that rings a bell for many Europeans. Resistance to assimilation is often perceived as rejection of the host society and host culture, thus it is interpreted as hostile. Discuss with participants how they perceive the social expectations concerning assimilation in their own context. What can members of the host society do to relieve this pressure?

Complementary material

The activity may continue with an exploration of the concept of assimilation. We propose Berry's matrix of acculturation strategies as a guide here, as it helps to make sense of the different related concepts such as integration and acculturation.

Evaluation

To assess the activity, you can ask participants how they feel, what they take from the activity, whether they had any difficulties in answering some questions, what kind of the inner response they had when listening to others.

Teaching tips, stories and experiences during piloting

If you find it too complicated, you do not need to use the system we proposed with the coloured pieces of paper.

Also, you do not need to do the first part of the activity if there is no time or if the objective of getting to know each other is not relevant.

The activity is primarily described in a form that can be used in teaching the teachers. However, it is an interesting activity to use with groups of other participants with migrant backgrounds. In this case, the change (in Step 5) will not be hypothetical but real, reflecting the experiences they may have had. For migrants that have lived in a new environment for a long time, the answers may already reflect some cultural adaptation. This is not a problem, it is even interesting to note that we do not necessarily integrate into 'our system' the elements of one specific culture, but a diversity of cultures. However, once they are integrated, they fulfil the same function, and they have the same value as any other element we may have been 'raised into'.

Additional resources

We were inspired by the activity, 'Onion of personal culture', shared on SALTO resources:
<https://educationaltoolsportal.eu/en/tools/onion-personal-culture>

Questions for self-reflection in the teaching practice

- What is your own position concerning assimilation?
- Within your own practice, can you think of ways in which hidden expectations concerning assimilation may influence your behaviour or your perception of others?