

ACTIVITY 26: DISCOVERING OUR OWN CULTURE THROUGH THE HERITAGE OF OTHERS

Overview of the activity

This activity is an invitation to realize that elements of cultural heritage can become an occasion for deeper understanding not only of another cultural group but also one's own values and representations.

Objectives

- Identify an element of cultural heritage that generates conflict in a given society
- Put this cultural heritage element under deeper scrutiny, exploring it from two perspectives: from an 'emic' point of view (What does it mean for members of the cultural group who are at the origin of this material or immaterial heritage?) and an 'etic' point of view (What does it mean from the perspective of those who do not belong to that particular group and may have negative or ambiguous interpretations of it?)

Duration (in minutes)	Min/max number of participants	Room/space requirements
Between 75 and 90 minutes	• Recommended: 8 • Minimum: 6 • Maximum: 12	A space that is large enough to place the chairs in a circle around a flipchart or around a table, so that everyone sees everyone

Minimum knowledge requirements of participants	Materials needed
The activity requires a good level of abstraction, which in turn requires a good knowledge of the language in which the activity is carried out	Flipchart paper Markers

Preparation

1. The activity is based on a contested element of cultural heritage, that is, a practice or a monument that generates conflict, tensions and misunderstandings in a given society. You need to identify such a practice or monument that participants can relate to. Wherever possible, it is an advantage if participants can propose a heritage element to work on themselves, but you should collect these ideas early enough to do some research on them yourself, enabling you to develop a sound understanding of the heritage and why it potentially generates conflict.
2. The activity requires a great level of trust, discipline and attention in carrying it out. Make sure you spend some time helping participants to get to know each other, and establish some ground rules that will ensure bold but controlled engagement.
3. To facilitate the work, prior to the session collect some visual representations of the heritage that you will work on. You could even collect some newspaper articles to illustrate in what ways it creates conflict.

Instructions

1. Start by telling participants that your mission together will be to explore and understand why a particular element of cultural heritage can be perceived in ambiguous ways: What are the indicators that generate misunderstandings and tensions in a given society?
2. Agree on a typical visual representation of the heritage – choose one of the images previously collected, possibly several images. Develop a neutral, objective, factual description of the heritage. If the heritage includes reference to a specific historical figure, include the name of the figure and one sentence on what he/she is known for. Take notes on this objective/factual description. Avoid value judgements at this stage.
3. The next task is to identify emotions that are triggered by this heritage: each participant should write how they feel about this heritage on a yellow post-it note. The post-its are then collected and grouped according to similar emotions. On green post-it notes you should also identify emotions that are typically triggered by this heritage in members of society who are not represented in the group. To do this, you can use the articles, websites, social media posts, etc. that have already been collected. Read out the list of emotions identified. Note how many different kinds of emotions you have identified.
4. For each type of emotion that you identified, try to determine what the underlying reasons are for the triggering of these emotions. Start with the more negative emotions and move towards the more positive. The task here is to be able to map values, norms and representations that may be important for the people who had these emotional responses. You can do this by asking the people who had a particular emotional response to talk about their values and norms. You should consider here that people are not necessarily aware of their own norms and values. So, you may need to use guiding questions to facilitate the process of identification. Both you and other participants can ask questions, propose hypotheses to help the participants identify these underlying values and norms. Also be aware that 'owning' negative emotions can be very difficult – and that it may be difficult for participants to whom that heritage has a strong positive/negative meaning. Whenever you feel it is very difficult for someone to assume the negative associations, work with emotions and interpretations that have been expressed in newspapers, posts, etc. that you have already collected.
5. Once you have identified values and norms underlying each type of emotion, reflect on what you found: To what extent are these values different? In what ways are they different?

Together, try to find points of similarity and convergence. Often, we find that the underlying values are not that different, but the difference is in how we represent them. The same value of 'respect' or 'beauty' can have very different expressions. It may also happen that the underlying values have different orientations in the same value dimension (e.g. individualism and collectivism/interdependence). In this case, reflect on what it takes for each of us to acknowledge that others may cherish different values. Are there situations in which we also adhere to those same values?

6. To conclude, discuss whether the activity taught you and the participants something about the recognition of other groups and their cultural heritage.

Learning outcomes / evidence collected

- The analysis of emotions and underlying values/representations can be informative in relation to the depth of the activity
- The emotions that participants identified related to specific heritage

Complementary material

Information previously collected from:

- – Newspaper articles
- – Books
- – Social media

Evaluation

- For an impact analysis, you can compare the negative attitudes/emotions associated with the heritage and consider at the end to what extent those attitudes and emotions changed. Perhaps, the emotion itself did not change but its intensity did. You can also ask directly whether and how the participants' attitude to the heritage changed or how their attitude towards members of the other groups involved changed.
- For an evaluation of satisfaction, you can ask participants to what extent they enjoyed the activity and to what extent it was useful and interesting.

Teaching tips, stories and experiences during piloting

- This activity is based on the recognition that emotional responses occur when something important to us is touched upon. In this sense, it is not the different cultural practice that directly triggers our emotions but our own beliefs and values that we hold dear and that are somehow touched by this practice. This is why naming our emotions can help us discover what is important to us. In this way, the cultural practice of the other is only a 'mediating' element. Yet, the negative emotions triggered will usually be connected to the cultural group, without any self-reflection.
- Identifying our own values and norms is not easy, it is not an exercise that we go around performing in our daily lives. To help this process, we propose some hypotheses or questions for the person whose values you are trying to elicit. We suggest starting with the concrete details of the cultural practice that is under exploration and try to ask concrete questions.
- Prior to starting the activity or at some point during the facilitation, talk about the 'positive' or 'negative' charges we attribute to emotions, and that it is important to share, detect and 'own' both negative and positive ones. In this sense, make sure you include a brief introductory activity or agree on establishing a safe space where people can express these emotions, with the purpose of collective critical reflection.

Questions for self-reflection in the teaching practice

Are there any cultural heritage elements or cultural practices belonging to other cultural groups towards which you have ambiguous or negative feelings? What about heritage elements of your own culture? Try to find elements which are supposed to belong to your group, yet trigger ambiguous feelings. Try to do the analysis to discover what is at the root of this ambiguity. In what way are these heritage elements or cultural practices present in the learning spaces you are a part of?