# CHAPTER 9

# CULTURAL PLURALISM

**By Fredricka L. Stoller and Katherine Reilly**

The theme of this chapter is cultural pluralism. A society that advocates cultural pluralism respects, values, and appreciates the contributions that are made by diverse groups within the society. Although some nations are made up of more diverse populations than others, each and every country has its share of diversity. Diversity, defined as variation among members of a society, may be linked to ethnicity, tribal affiliation, race, religion, socio-economic class, language and dialect, national origins, educational level, wealth, property ownership, age, gender, and disability. Societies that view diversity as a positive force strive to balance societal unity with societal diversity. In general, societies that promote cultural pluralism also nurture the values and beliefs that are associated with civil societies.

The 50-minute lesson outlined in this chapter provides students with an opportunity to explore aspects of cultural pluralism while simultaneously improving their language skills. Teachers have the option of using the suggested lesson in several ways: They can adapt it to meet the needs of their students, as a single, stand-alone lesson; or they can design a series of connected lessons that explore the topic in more detail; or they can develop a thematic unit that examines the topic from a variety of perspectives. The ideas presented here are starting points for teachers interested in exploring the topic of cultural pluralism with their students.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Societies that value cultural pluralism, or at least work toward understanding the benefits of cultural pluralism, face the challenge of finding a balance between diversity and unity. To find the appropriate balance, such societies must nurture two complementary orientations:

1. the cultural enrichment that develops from multiple beliefs, ideas, and loyalties

2. the commitment to shared values, principles, and beliefs

The first orientation honors diversity while the second orientation unifies society and promotes a common identity (see Quigley & Bahmueller, 1991).

In stable pluralistic societies, citizens view diversity as positive rather than negative; they view diversity as a benefit rather than a threat; they appreciate the multiple viewpoints, customs, and choices that result from cultural pluralism rather than fear different traditions and opinions. In a society that is proud of its

diversity, citizens see differences as having the potential for strengthening society rather than weakening it.

Because most societies are diverse in one way or another, a positive orientation toward diversity and cultural pluralism benefits the society. Yet, when an appreciation for diversity does not exist in society, what often results is discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, hatred, unjust practices, violence, persecution, racism, and a lack of support for individual rights.

Unfortunately, conflicts in diverse societies are common. They often occur when citizens do not communicate, are unwilling to consider different points of view, and refuse to accept different traditions and beliefs. The negative perspectives and potentially harmful behaviors associated with societies that do not value cultural pluralism may be minimized when citizens take the following steps:

1. face their prejudices;

2. work on identifying common beliefs, interests and goals;

3. learn about each others' customs, traditions, and histories;

4. listen to new perspectives with open minds; and

5. respect the rights of others to promote the common good.

## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

The following lesson plan highlights issues related to cultural pluralism. Teachers are encouraged to adapt this lesson to the language and content learning needs of their students.

**Preliminary Lesson Planning**

*Materials:*

Collect a series of pictures (from magazines, newspapers, or other sources) that corresponds to the checklist of items in **Appendix A.** The pictures should represent people from different ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds, as well as a variety of different physical appearances (e.g., body size and shape, clothing, age, gender). For each group of students, make a photocopied set of 10 pictures (pictures representing 10 of the suggested picture-items on the checklist). It is best if all groups have photocopies of the same pictures. If a photocopier is unavailable, collect sets of similar, though not necessarily identical, pictures for student groups. On the back of each picture, write a letter from A-J; pictures representing specific sub-cultures in each of the sets, whether they are identical pictures or similar pictures, should be assigned the same letters. (For example, a picture of someone wearing formal business attire should be labeled A in all sets of pictures.)

Make a set of identity cards, such as those listed in **Appendix B**, for each group. Adjust the vocabulary in the identity descriptions to the proficiency levels of your students. On the back of each identity card, put a number from 1-10, as indicated in Appendix B; identity cards in each of the sets should be given the same

numbers. (As an example, the information on identity card #1 should be the same for each group of students.)

To complete Activity 2, match each identity card (1-10) to a specific picture (A-J). These matches should be assigned counter-intuitively. That is, assign each picture to an identity card that your students would *not* expect. For example, picture A (a woman in her 40s) matches identity #10 (Vice Presidential skills); picture B (a 26 year old man from the majority religion) matches identity #6 (secretarial skills). Assign matches after reading the job descriptions proposed in **Activity 1, step1.**

Create a list of the identity card-picture matches; write the assigned identity card numbers along one side of a sheet of paper and the letter of the matching pictures along the other side. This list will be used later to challenge learners' assumptions about people's capabilities for certain jobs.

*Student grouping:*

For the warm-up activity, group students in pairs or in groups of three, depending on class size. Participants will remain in the same groups for activities 1 and 2. Make last minute adjustments when it is determined which students are actually in class.

*Vocabulary considerations:*

Determine which vocabulary items the students already know and which items they will need to be introduced to. Some important terms, and their definitions, are included in a glossary in **Appendix C.**

## Warm Up Activity (5 minutes)

*Purpose:*

- To stimulate student interest in the topic of **cultural pluralism**

- To draw out participants' background knowledge

- To introduce vocabulary that will be useful in completing the lesson

*Procedures:*

1. Ask students to find one or two partners. While they are doing this, write "List at least three reasons why people do not get along or socialize together" on the board.

2. Elicit only one suggestion from the class, to be used as a model before groups begin brainstorming on their own. Some possible examples include age, religion, race, gender, social class, physical appearance, or job status. Ask students to discuss the prompt/task in groups and complete their lists as quickly as possible.

3. Ask for volunteers to report on their lists. Write their answers on the board.

4. Ask students the following question: What do we call it when people make **judgments** and refuse to interact with people for these reasons? (Direct students' attention back to the board when you state "for these reasons.") Student responses might include **prejudice**, **stereotypes**, **discrimination**, **racism**, **ageism**, or **sexism**.

**Transition from Warm Up to Activity #1**

Tell participants that today's class will focus on prejudices, stereotypes, and judgments that make it difficult for a variety of groups to interact harmoniously in their shared community or country.

**Activity #1 (approximately 20 minutes)**

*Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way

- To give students an opportunity to consider their feelings and assumptions based on physical appearance alone

- To develop students' language confidence by allowing them to express their choices and opinions in English

*Procedures:*

1. Divide students into groups. While students are getting into their groups, write the three job descriptions listed here on the board. (Adapt the vocabulary in these job descriptions to the proficiency level of your students.)

   a. A secretary to do general office work such as answering phones, typing, running the fax machine, scheduling appointments, and greeting clients;

   b. A salesperson to interact with long-time clients and increase business by finding new clients;

   c. A vice president to manage the company, supervise and hire staff, and handle upset customers and their complaints.

2. Explain that each group represents the owners of a medium-sized, import/export business; the company is called Around the World, Inc. The company needs to hire 3 new employees, one person for each of the positions listed on the board.

3. Distribute an identical set of 10 photocopied pictures to each group. Tell the class that these are pictures of people who have applied to work at Around the World. Looking only at the pictures, they will have to decide which of the applicants to hire for each position. They must select one person for each position. Groups must discuss and to explain their rationale for choosing or rejecting each person. They should be prepared to report their assumptions about each candidate's a) general abilities, b) personality, and c) character, and d) potential conflicts that could arise with different applicants in each position. (List these four points on the board). Give students about 15 minutes to reach their decision.

4.  Ask volunteers to explain one of their choices, until an example has been given for each position. Then ask volunteers to explain one of their rejections, until an example has been given for each position. Ask all groups: Were any of your choices based on the ability of certain groups to get along with other groups (e.g., in the business world, within the country, internationally)? Were any of your choices based on the ability of certain groups to be accepted by other groups (e.g., in the business world, within the country, internationally)?

## Activity #2 (approximately 20 minutes)

*Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way

- To require students to make judgments about people based their abilities and experience

- To challenge student perceptions about interacting with a variety of people

*Procedures:*

1.  In groups ask students to take the pictures off their desks. While they are doing this, hand out a set of identity cards to each group.

2.  Explain that they must now reconsider their 3 hiring choices, based solely on the information listed on each card. They will be looking for the three sets of qualifications that best fit the positions available. Again, they must discuss and be able to explain their rationale for accepting or rejecting each identity card. Give students about 10 minutes to reach their decision.

3.  For each position, ask for 3 volunteers to report their groups' choices. If there are differences among the groups, have them discuss reasons for their choices.

4.  Ask the groups why they think their identity card selections match their picture selections.

5.  Once students have chosen their ideal pictures and identities, give them the "true" identity/photo matches. Tell students to look at the letters and numbers on the backs of their pictures and identity cards. Read the numbered and lettered list of "true" identity/photo matches; groups listen and match each picture to its proper identity card.

6.  Ask students one or more of the following questions:

    a.  Was it difficult to complete the previous activities? Why?

    b.  Which activity was more difficult? Why?

    c.  Did your feelings about people in the pictures make you feel uncomfortable in any way?

    d.  Would your choices have been different if each picture initially came with an identity card? Why?

**Cool Down Activity (approximately 5 minutes)**

*Purpose:*

- To conclude the lesson

- To give students an opportunity to discuss the relevance of the lesson

*Procedures:*

1. Write "Cultural Pluralism" on the board.

    a. Ask students what they think the term means. Write key words on the board.

    b. If students are unsure, explain that cultural pluralism is the idea of one society built around many cultures and groups. Explain that cultural pluralism can only work if groups learn to appreciate people's differences and respect their abilities and contributions.

2. Ask students to suggest what they have learned about their attitudes toward different cultures, different groups, and cultural pluralism. Ask the following: Suggest ways in which your prejudices and stereotypes might make it difficult for our country to successfully promote cultural pluralism. How can you change this?

**Possible Extensions to Lesson**

1. Ask students to respond, either orally or in writing, to any of these follow-up questions:

    a. How important is a person's physical appearance in determining his or her ability to do a job?

    b. What is the ideal physical appearance for a man and a woman in our country?

    c. Think of foreign films that you have seen or foreign books that you have read. Are standards of physical beauty the same in other parts of the world? How do they differ?

    d. Which groups are most valued in our country and why? Why do you think other groups are viewed as less valuable? Do you think these ideas can or should be changed? Why or why not? How can they be changed?

    e. How frequently do you interact with members of other groups/cultures? What types of interactions do you have with members of other groups/cultures?

    f. Think of all the different cultures, sub-cultures, and groups that exist within our country. How many of these do you belong to?

    g. How would society be different if the contributions, skills, and ideas of all cultures were valued equally? Is this possible? Why or why not?

2. Have groups create a story about an imaginary country where every citizen is from the same ethnic and religious background, where everyone has the same eye and hair color, where everyone's skills and contributions are identical. Could such a country exist? How would it function? Would it be successful? What problems would it have? Would everyone get along? Would you want to visit such a country? Why? Why not?

3. In groups, have students draft a "Bill of Cultural Pluralism," denoting 10 rules which, if followed, would greatly enhance attitudes toward cultural pluralism.

4. Ask students to consider this question: What are the advantages of cultural pluralism? Then ask students to develop a list of strategies that will encourage cultural pluralism and tolerance within their community. What will they do to help their children appreciate other cultures and sub-cultures?

Back to the top of Chapter 9

**Appendix A**

**Checklist for Picture Collection**

Following are descriptions of the types of people that might be represented in your set of pictures. It is important to have a great deal of variety in your pictures. Descriptions may be mixed and matched, so that there is, for example, both a well-dressed woman and a casually dressed woman or elderly people from minority and majority races or cultural groups. Famous or well-known people should NOT be used.

1. People from the minority race(s) or cultural groups in your country

2. Someone from the majority race or cultural group in your country

3. People from the minority religion(s) in your country

4. Someone from the majority religion in your country

5. Men

6. Women

7. People from each of the predominant social classes in your country

8. Someone wearing extremely formal, business attire

9. Someone wearing casual, relaxed clothing

10. People who fit the ideal standard of beauty in your country: consider eye and hair color, hair style, weight, height, body shape

11. People who are considered less attractive by your country's beauty standards: consider eye and hair color, hair style, weight, height, body shape

12. People of a wide variety of ages (between 18 and 75 years old

(back to Preliminary Lesson Planning)

# Appendix B

## Identity Cards

**Identity 1**

*Education:* Bachelor's Degree in English

*Experience:* 4 years in sales for a large, international advertising company

*Other:* Satisfactory number of sales; hard worker; had problems with upper management at old company

**Identity 2**

*Education:* Bachelor's Degree in art history

*Experience:* 1 year as a doctor's receptionist; 2 years as a secretary for an advertising agency

*Other:* Computer knowledge, quick typist, gets along with most people

**Identity 3**

*Education:* High school and 1 year of secretarial college

*Experience:* 3 years as a secretary for a small business; 5 years as a secretary for a large company

*Other:* Excellent telephone skills; computer knowledge; sometimes impatient; does not get along with everyone

**Identity 4**

*Education:* Bachelor's Degree in business; Master's Degree in business administration

*Experience:* None; just graduated from university

*Other:* Highly recommended by professors; expected to be very successful

**Identity 5**

*Education:* Bachelor's Degree in international relations

*Experience:* 5 years as a manager at a large European company

*Other:* Some complaints from employees, though gets along very well with upper management; fair communication skills

**Identity 6**

*Education:* High school

*Experience:* Worked in father's office for 3 months

*Other:* Excellent references, very fast typist, pleasant personality, extremely patient and organized, computer and phone skills

**Identity 7**

*Education:* High school and 2 years of university

*Experience:* 12 years as a salesperson at a medium-sized international company

*Other:* Large number of sales; strong ties to customers; excellent communication skills; easy to work with

**Identity 8**

*Education:* Bachelor's Degree in political science

*Experience:* 3 years as a low-level employee for a large, multinational company; 3 years middle-management for a large, U.S. company

*Other:* Excellent writing and communication skills; works well with all types of people; strong leadership skills

**Identity 9**

*Education:* Bachelor's Degree in business and a Master's Degree in advertising

*Experience:* 3 years sales with a life insurance company; 4 years sales for a clothing company; 3 years sales for an international magazine

*Other:* Large number of sales, hard worker, works well with clients, poor communication skills and difficulty getting along with other employees

**Identity 10**

*Education:* Bachelor's Degree in economics

*Experience:* 1 year with a large, Japanese company; 1 year with a small local business; 2 years with a large European company

*Other:* Good leadership skills, though no management experience; excellent references; good verbal and written communication skills; considered to have management potential; gets along well with everyone

(back to **Preliminary Lesson Planning)**