

Overview:

This lesson plan will challenge participants to consider how certain aspects of culture can be visible (such as food and clothing) while others can be invisible (such as religious beliefs). In this activity, they will use the metaphor of an iceberg to understand these different types of cultural qualities.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the iceberg analogy of culture.
2. Articulate whether some aspects of culture are visible or invisible.

Background Information:

This activity was developed by Dr. Kris Acheson-Clair, CILMAR. The idea of the cultural iceberg (or the iceberg analogy of culture) comes from Edward T. Hall's (1976) *Beyond Culture* (see citation below).

Time:

25 minutes

Group Size:

Entire group

Materials:

Iceberg images to display, plenty of post-it notes, and pens.

Note: There is a video that models this activity in [Links](#). The relevant portion begins at 34 seconds and ends at seven minutes. Also included in [Links](#): two sample iceberg images. There are also a variety to choose from on Google Images.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**Cultural Self-Awareness:**

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks:

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Other Skills:

Teamwork, Diversity & Inclusion

Activity instructions:

1. Display an image of an iceberg. Explain the cultural analogy of the iceberg, where some aspects of culture are visible (above the water line) and others are hidden beneath the surface. Explain that visible aspects are obvious to members outside of the culture, while invisible aspects are hidden to people outside of the culture. However, when explaining the analogy, avoid using specific cultural examples (as they will be needed for the activity).
2. Distribute Post-its to the group. Ask the participants to write one aspect of culture on each Post-it (such as language, dress, etc.). Each member should complete 4-5 post-its. Ask them to write in large lettering so that each Post-it is visible from a distance. The group may work individually or in pairs.
3. Once everyone has finished, ask each participant to come up to the iceberg image and place their Post-it on the iceberg accordingly: on the visible part of the iceberg above the water, under the water line, or on the water line (if they are unsure or think it could be both visible and invisible). Ask participants to stack Post-its of the same or similar topics (i.e. food, meals, diet, etc.)
4. Once all the Post-its are placed and organized, ask each participant (or a few volunteers) to come up and select a Post-it from above from the water line (visible culture). Then ask them to indicate a Post-it below the water line (invisible culture) that is connected to it. For example, above the water line, dress and food could both be connected to religious beliefs about modesty (below the water line).
5. After completing step 4, discuss where the rest of the topics are posted. Discuss/clarify why certain aspects of culture are visible or invisible. What cultural aspects can go in both or on the line between? Note what topics comprise the majority of the Post-its (food, language, etc.) and ask why?
6. Remove the Post-its and display an example of the Iceberg chart with the cultural aspects filled in (see Links). Discuss the hidden depths and how these things matter in forming and maintaining relationships. How else do the hidden depths impact perception, stereotypes, etc.?
7. Discuss the implications for cultural outsiders when so much of culture is invisible. Ask the participants to consider their experience of culture when they have been the outsider and when they have been the insider.

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- [Direct-Indirect Communication](#)
- [Four Levels of Cultural Awareness](#)
- [Human Values Continuum](#)
- [Individualist-Collectivist Quiz](#)
- [Linking Values with Culture Quiz](#)
- [Metaphors for Culture](#)
- [Monochronic-Polychronic Quiz](#)
- [Universal-Cultural-Personal Quiz](#)
- [Universalist or Particularist?](#)
- [Universalist-Particularist Quiz](#)