

# Exploring cultural identity in the classroom

Raed Omar Brahedni  
Senior Manager - Saudi Arabia, Bahrain & Kuwait

Tabinda Mazhar  
Professional Development Manager, Pakistan

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# Objectives

By the end of the session, you will have:

- ▶ Reflected and raised self-awareness about your own identity
- ▶ Explored the terms 'culture' and 'cultural identity' and their significance in child development
- ▶ Identified challenging situations and suggested recommendations to support diverse cultural identities in school
- ▶ Discussed the notions of 'diversity', 'inclusion' and 'cultural appropriation' while trying to sustain cultural identity of individual/s.

# Identity mind mapping

- ▶ Think of yourself as an individual.
- ▶ Create an identity mind map of yourself, describing what makes you, you!



# Example

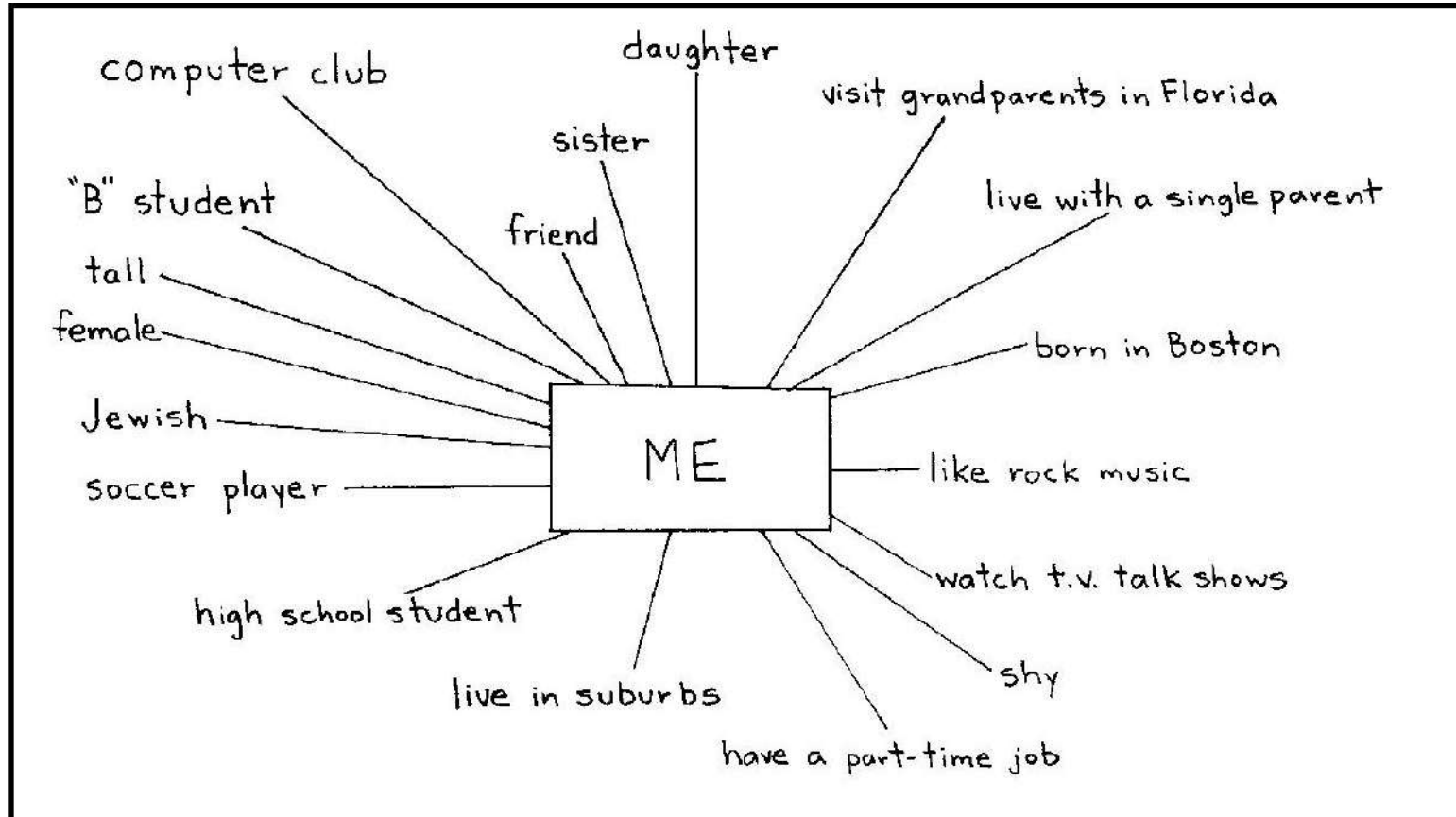


Image credit: <https://www.theadventboston.org/power-for-publicans-pharisees/>



# What makes you...YOU



- ▶ In pairs, pick out the most important aspects that make you who you are.

# Cultural identity

- ▶ What is cultural identity, and how important is it to you?

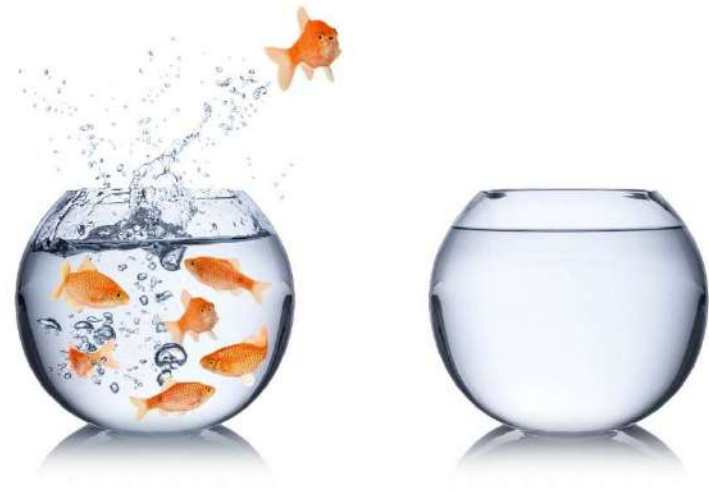
# Walk down memory lane

- ▶ Do you remember a time when you felt a connection with someone who shared your cultural background?
- ▶ Describe that feeling.
- ▶ What made you feel connected to that person?



# Walk down memory lane

- ▶ Think of a time when you met someone/ was part of a group of people who belonged to another culture and did not share your cultural background.
- ▶ How did you feel?



# Unpicking a real life situation

- ▶ Close your eyes and think of your school/class/group you work with: focus on the diversity within that group.



# Activity

- ▶ Recall a particular interaction with/of that group.
- ▶ Describe this scene to the person sitting next to you. Talk about the kind of interaction, positives, negatives and interesting things that stood out relating to cultural identity.
- ▶ How did you deal with that? Did it work or not?
- ▶ Think of some opportunities and challenges that learners face and how can they learn from each other?

*Pick one that you witnessed yourself.*

# What does the theory say?

- ▶ Cultural theory of identity (CTI)
- ▶ Properties of Cultural Identity
- ▶ Berry's Model of Cultural Assimilation: Integration, Assimilation, Marginalisation, Separation.
- ▶ Hybrid identity/ Multiple identities/ Third culture kids


Children of everywhere  
and nowhere



# Developing a culturally responsible environment

- ▶ Know your students
- ▶ Be a role model and set the tone in the classroom
- ▶ Provide representation/images of cultural diversity
- ▶ Collaborate
- ▶ Be in it for the long haul.

(Nicole, 2015)



In small groups, work through the case study given to you and devise strategies to help the learner adjust to the school culture while demonstrating respect for the child's home culture.

Key things to consider: Cultural identity, celebrating diversity, inclusion and cultural appropriation.

# Mind your language

Adan will spend his first day in school tomorrow. Until now he has been at home with his parents and his grandfather. His family came from Syria as refugees just before Adan was born four years ago. Prior to that, they lived in a refugee camp for three years. Adan's father and mother are learning to speak English but the family speaks Arabic at home.

When Adan's parents registered him at the school, they asked if they should start speaking English to him at home to help him with his transition.

As the principal:

- ▶ What advice would you give them?
- ▶ What are some things you could do to ease Adan's transition to school?
- ▶ What information could Adan's family give you to help you to make him feel more comfortable in the new setting?
- ▶ How could you work with Adan's family over time to help support him in developing a strong cultural identity?

# Lowmein

Meganne, an early years teacher notices that four year old Mei Ling is sitting in her cubby with a sad expression on her face. She approaches and sits down beside her.

“Mei Ling, I notice that you look unhappy. Are you feeling sad?” Mei Ling nods and tears well up in her eyes. “Would you like to tell me about it?” asks Meganne gently.

“The kids say that I have worms in my lunch,” Mei Ling sobs. “They say I dress funny!”

- ▶ What could you say to Mei Ling?
- ▶ What could you do to help the other children be more accepting of Mei Ling’s food and clothing?
- ▶ How could you work with Mei Ling’s family to create a classroom environment that includes her culture?

# Ghostbuster

When Samira's parents come to visit the school, her mother is wearing a burka. You notice one of the children giggling to another and pointing at her. You hear the word "ghost."

- ▶ What might you say to the children?
- ▶ If Samira's parents decide to enrol her in the school, what are some things you could do to help her feel more comfortable there and prevent teasing?
- ▶ How could you work with Samira's family over time to help support her in feeling proud of her culture?

# Fusion

Because of its diverse student population, a school in London has decided to hold a Festival of Lights rather than a Christmas concert. Some of the staff and families are upset.

“We’re so careful to respect other cultures that we don’t get to celebrate our own,” they complain.

We increase the chances that a change will be accepted if we ensure that the people who are affected by it are able to play a role in the decision.

- ▶ What process could a school use to decide how to handle celebrations?
- ▶ How could the situation be explained to families and staff so they could make an informed decision that is respectful of all families?

# Men are from Mars, women are from Venus

Enis is in Grade 9 and when he is made to work in a mixed gender group for his History project, he refuses to mingle with the girls saying men and women cannot be friends and boys should be a man's best friends. Girls are different and cannot be good friends to boys.

“They only talk about make-up and selfies and have no knowledge about cars and hard rock..”

- ▶ What can you do to encourage friendship across the mixed gender in the class?
- ▶ How can you dispel some of the mindsets and stereotypes Enis is displaying without challenging his cultural values?

# Breaking barriers

Jane identifies herself as Irish American and grew up in a large Roman Catholic family. As is common with many teachers, Jane is the first family member to have attended college. Her father was a factory worker, and her mother stayed home to take care of her seven children. When Jane did well enough in school to think about college, her family was divided. On the one hand, some members of her family felt that Jane had an obligation to earn money when she graduated from high school to support the family. Going to college seemed like a way to avoid that responsibility. On the other hand, her father knew that Jane could have greater opportunities if she went on to college. They decide to come to you for future career counselling.

- ▶ What advice would you give to the family?
- ▶ Consider Jane and her education but also the family tradition and culture.

# Maths myths

At a meeting with parents, you are told that their child, who is not very good at mathematics, is constantly told by the teacher that she is Asian so her Mathematics should be good.

- ▶ What will be your response to the parents, teacher and the student?

# Cultural mis-appropriation

At the International School's Halloween party which caters to children from diverse cultural backgrounds, some children dress up as Masai warriors, without realising that this has rich cultural value for other people and can be offensive to them.

- ▶ How will you address this?
- ▶ How will you raise awareness and develop sensitivity of children towards other ethnic minorities?

# You want me to be what?

A primary school in Dubai chooses to celebrate the Chinese New Year and do an enactment of their celebrations. One girl from Pakistan is chosen to become the pig. Next day, the parents come to meet the principal saying their daughter has been crying since yesterday and they cannot accept that she is given such an offensive character; also why the school is celebrating this?

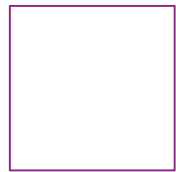
- ▶ What will you say to the parents, the child, and to your staff about this situation?

# Takeaways

Share one thing that you learnt about another culture today.

How will you share this with your colleagues at school?





**Any questions?**

# References

- ▶ [http://www.niusileadscape.org/docs/FINAL\\_PRODUCTS/NIU SI/toolkit\\_cd/4%20%20Implementing%20Change/OnPoints/OP\\_cultural\\_identity.pdf](http://www.niusileadscape.org/docs/FINAL_PRODUCTS/NIU_SI/toolkit_cd/4%20%20Implementing%20Change/OnPoints/OP_cultural_identity.pdf)
- ▶ <https://nccj.org/blog/unraveling-misconceptions-what-cultural-appropriation>



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# THANK YOU

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