

Teaching learning activities | Empathy

Story circle A structured but adaptable tool, which focuses on fundamental elements of intercultural competencies development, including empathy.

For more information and detailed instructions:

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370336>

Storyteller Storyteller is a product from students for students. It is about creating a story about a person's life perspectives and experiences inspired by an interview and expressed using any medium such as fiction, podcast or sculpture. First, an open invitation needs to be sent out to invite people to share their story. Then, a student conducts an interview. The interviewee is asked to decide on a location. Third, decide into which medium the story should be translated. Forth, the interviewee is asked for feedback on the story and will name the final product to highlight the co-creative nature of the product. Lastly, the story can be shared with students and staff and stored in a public repository. For an example of a story, see this blog [Thom: er is een blog met een verhaal over een student].

Fear in a hat James McNeil's version of the fear in a hat exercise about group interpersonal understanding. It builds on the insight from self-empathy work that we are part of a common humanity and that we all share worries, fears and hardships. A description of the exercise can be found at www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0405-fearinahat.html

Character Strengths Interventions Character Strengths have been studied extensively in positive psychology after seminal work by Martin Seligman. Ryan Niemiec (have a look at his TED-talk) has written a practical guide for developing Character Strengths, and his Values In Action (VIA) website hosts the VIA survey (for extensive background information, see Niemiec (2018)); there is also ample material on the website viacharacter.org with references to research here: <https://www.viacharacter.org/research/findings>, for instance showing that single session interventions can impact student thriving (Bu & Duan, 2018).

Strength-based interventions seem more promising than traditional deficiency-based interventions that seek to offer remedies for a person's weaknesses or deficiencies, provided that they do not trigger a fixed mindset in which people frame Character Strengths as stable personality traits (Ghielen et al., 2018).

For teaching empathy, a loving-kindness meditation can be used (e.g., CSI 30 in Niemiec (2018) or the exercise below).

Loving Kindness Instructions

This exercise is about unconditional love and kindness without boundaries.

It starts by getting comfortable and focusing on the "heart center" of the body. The first goal is kindness towards oneself, which can be created by silently saying phrases like "May I be safe and protected" (see more examples p.179).

It then moves from oneself to a person that invites the feeling of unconditional love and kindness. This could be a mentor, parent or grandparent. The phrases are repeated for that person and after that for a friend while always breathing and focusing on the heart centre. Thereafter this procedure is repeated for a neutral person. Afterward the participant moves toward a person they dislike and try to repeat the phrases for them or something like: "To

the best of my ability...". Lastly, love and kindness is spread for all beings. "May all beings be safe, happy, healthy, live joyously."

Ref: Barbezat, D. P., & Bush, M. (2014). Compassion and Loving Kindness. *Contemplative practices in higher education: Powerful methods to transform teaching and learning* (1st ed, pp.174-188) John Wiley & Sons.

Taking Social Psychology to the Streets:

Humans of Maastricht

Inspired by the *Humans of New York* photography blog by Brandon Stanton (www.humansofnewyork.com)

Designed to help the students become more aware of the everyday diversity that exists around them. It aims to reduce stereotypes and prejudice toward unfamiliar or misunderstood groups by fostering a sense of connectedness and empathy with strangers.

The task is to approach five people, couples, or families whom the students do not know and whom they consider different from themselves. They are supposed to interview the people and take a photo of them. Additionally, they have to write a reflection report in which they analyse their experience and relate it to the concepts of the course (in this case Social Psychology at UCM).

The students will share their experience with tutorial group members in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

Based on: <https://www.actionteaching.org/award/humans-of-northeast-pennsylvania>

For more information and teaching activities: <https://www.actionteaching.org/>

References:

Deardorff, D. K. (2019). *Manual for developing intercultural competencies: Story circles*. Routledge.

Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners*. Boston, MA: Hogrefe Publishing

Bu, H., & Duan, W. (2018). A single-session positive cognitive intervention on first-year students' mental health: Short-term effectiveness and the mediating role of strengths knowledge. *Journal of American College Health*.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1497639>

Ghielen, S. T. S., van Woerkom, M., & Christina Meyers, M. (2018). Promoting positive outcomes through strengths interventions: A literature review. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 13(6), 573-585.