

Aims

- To identify some of the factors that can shape a national culture.
- To show the difference between describing your own national culture and describing somebody else's.

Procedure

- 1 Ask students for ideas on the main factors which shape and define different national cultures. Encourage them to include attitudes and institutions as well as the more obvious behavioural aspects.
- 2 Explain that they should study the lists and do task 1 in pairs or groups, adding or removing any items they think necessary. If they have no suggestions, move quickly on to task 2.
- 3 The aim of task 2 is, with the help of the lists, to provide useful information for a visitor to a given country. Each student should consider their own country and another one; in multicultural classes this will mean forming pairs, but larger groups can be formed in less varied classes. You may prefer to ask students to select the three or four most important factors. Feedback through a spokesperson should pick out which factors are important, and how the visitor can benefit from being aware of them.

Outcomes

Focus on the difference between describing aspects of your own national culture and those of another. Did students find it easier to do one than the other. Also ask students to identify any differences between how they see their own national culture and how others see it. Is one view more critical than another? Were they surprised by the (in)accuracy of other people's views? There should be a variety of responses here, leading to discussion.

Development

Ask the class to develop their ideas into a more generalised description of their own national culture, still focusing on the key factors. This is similar to the exercise in 3.4; here it may also be applied to a culture other than the student's own.

Linked activities

3.3, 3.4

Further reading

A short discussion of how cultures originate can be found in pp. 25–8 in

Culture's Consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations, by Geert Hofstede, 2001 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

See also

The Silent Language, by E.T. Hall, 1997, New York: Anchor Books.