

Common Ground¹

5-30 minutes

Objective

To provide participants with the opportunity to explore differences and commonalities.

Materials

Your list of statements

Sample Statements:

Morning, Hot beverage drinkers

Speak more than one language

Born in the midwest

Born in the south

Born in the east coast

Born in the west

Born outside the U.S.

Have African Heritage

Have Asian Heritage

Have European Heritage

Have Native Heritage

Have Latin American Heritage

Identify as multicultural or bicultural

Has had an Asian/Asian-American teacher

Identifies or knows anyone who identifies as Heterosexual

Identifies or knows anyone who identifies as LGB or T

Most of your friends are the same gender as yours

Procedures

- Ask participants to form a large circle.
- Inform the group that the activity will allow them to get to know one another.
- Tell the participants that you will read a series of statements. If the statement is true for them, they should walk to the center of the room and gather in a circle. After introducing themselves, they should talk about how the statement speaks to them for a few minutes and then return to the larger circle.
- Once you read all of the statements, ask the group to comment on how it was to do this activity.
- In wrapping up the activity, highlight the value of exploring commonalities and differences. Encourage the participants to follow up with one another later.

Note to the Facilitator

- This activity can be used as a low-risk icebreaker, a medium-risk bonding experience or a high-risk team builder and discussion starter. You will need to gage the use of this activity depending on how well the group knows each other and your goals with the group.
- This activity can be set up in many different ways depending on the size of the room, the amount of open space and the mobility of the participants. Participants can make a large circle, or simply raise their hand or stand up from their desks or chairs.

¹ Susie Mitton, (2000). Social Justice Education Concentration, School of Education, University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

- If this activity is used as a high-risk activity, you may want to conduct it in silence asking participants to simply notice who enters the circle and who does not as you go through the statements.
- For medium or high-risk activities you will need to debrief with more depth. Once back in the larger circle, you may ask participants to turn to the person next to them and share their feelings about the activity. Either in dyads or back as a large group some helpful debrief questions are as follows. What did you notice as you and others were going in and out of the circle? What surprised you? What was uncomfortable for you? What was comfortable for you?