Discovering Your Cultural Diversity

Background:
You can use this activity as a tool to help students recognize that they are members of groups that influence their own cultural identity. It can also be used to help students visually outline the many cultural influences on characters from texts that they are reading in class (as outlined in the extension section below).

Instructions:
1. Distribute the “You as a Culturally Diverse Person” handout (Duplicable Masters section, p. DM-33) and give your students a few minutes to complete the diagram.

2. Ask each student to write a word they feel describes him/herself, a significant part of who they are, or how they would choose to identify themselves to others (e.g., sister, student, African-American, Christian, Democrat). Ask them to fill in as many circles as possible.

Debriefing:
Have students discuss the various aspects of their cultural selves with their classmates. This discussion can be done as an entire class or in small groups. Intermediate- and higher-level students can discuss their diagrams using the target language. As a variation, have students complete the diagram putting into the center a country where the target language is spoken.

Sample questions include:

- If you had to pick just one circle, which would it be? Two circles? Why are these the most important parts of your cultural identity?
- Did you have difficulty filling in eight circles? Did you find eight was not enough? What insights have you gained about yourself from this exercise? Is there an identity that others don’t readily recognize in you? Is this OK? Or is it frustrating?
- Go back to the diagram and add some of the values you attribute to the circles. For example, values from being a student might be “independence,” “respect for knowledge,” or “question authority.” Are there places where the values conflict?
- How might these circles change if you were abroad? For example, did you list your nationality in one of the circles? Your social class? Did you list the languages you speak? How might it feel to be seen as only one circle, such as U.S. American?
- How might the roles you play in the U.S. be similar and different in your host country?

Adapted from Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994.
**Extension:**
You can use the Culturally Diverse Person Model to help your students understand texts and characters. Students often struggle to understand a cultural phenomenon, character or process introduced in a text (such as themes of ethnicity, education, national identity, stereotypes, etc., that are often included in intermediate and advanced language texts, including excerpts of literature). The Culturally Diverse Person Model works extremely well in helping students follow class themes and specific authors or characters and to better grasp why these themes and texts are important in the process of language and culture learning.

**Example:**

An example of using this model in an advanced Spanish class shows how the model helps students understand the cultural diversity of author Victoria Ocampo of Argentina, who laments the cultural influence that the French language and education system has had in the formation of her own cultural identity. Students find her writing difficult to follow and typically do not understand why they are even asked to study this text! Using the diagram helps students more easily grasp the complexity of Ms. Ocampo’s life experiences and discuss the cultural issues that come up within the text using the concepts and language used in the diagram.