

## Overview:

This lesson plan will challenge participants to identify their "mindful me"—the thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and sensations behind their "autobiographical I" (i.e. the stories and experiences that make up their lives). In this activity, they will, with a partner, reflect on the emotions behind a pleasant and unpleasant experience in their lives. Then, the facilitator will debrief with the entire group.

## Background and Information:

This activity was created by Mick Vande Berg for an intercultural learning workshop held at Purdue University (see citation below) and a session of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program offered by the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Shrewsbury, MA.

## Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. "Identify and focus attention on the 'mindful me'—the thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and physical sensations that lie beneath their 'Autobiographical I.'"
2. Distinguish between two different levels of identity, the 'Autobiographical I' and the 'Mindful Me'" (Vande Berg, 2016, n.p.).
3. Learn to deal with and express their emotions.
4. Develop comfort with others' expressions of emotion.
5. Develop empathy for others and practice empathetic listening.

## Time:

45 minutes

## Group Size:

Pairs

*Note:* There should be no fewer than 6 total participants. If there's an odd number of participants, one group can work in threes.

## Materials:

A bell to call time and a flip chart or white board to record participant responses.

*Note:* Also ensure that there is enough space for pairs of participants to talk without disturbing the conversations of others.

## Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Minimization
- Acceptance

**AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**
**Empathy**

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group

**Other Skills:**

Friendship, Emotional resilience

**Activity instructions:**

1. Ask participants to take two minutes to reflect on and think of both a recent "pleasant experience" and a recent "unpleasant experience" that they can talk about and share with another participant.
2. Ask them to separate into pairs.
3. Tell them that they're going to describe, first, a pleasant, and then an unpleasant, experience by not talking about the things that we normally do when we talk with others about our experiences: they're not going to label or give any of the sorts of information that they normally provide in describing an experience (for example, they're not going to say, "I had this strange experience in line at the store yesterday, when this woman said to me such and such, and then I said to her thus and so"). Be sure to emphasize that at no time during this activity will they label and tell their partner the normal "this is what happened" information they normally provide in talking about their experiences.
4. Tell them that instead, they're going to describe the emotions they experienced, the thoughts they had during the experience, and the physical sensations they felt—and they're going to describe the experience in the present tense, as if they're re-experiencing it now.
5. Ask them to take turns describing for each other their pleasant experiences. Be sure to ask them to describe the experience in the present tense, as if they're re-experiencing the event right now. Tell them that when one member of the pair is describing his or her story, the other person will remain silent.
6. Let them know that after two minutes, you'll ring a bell, and that at that point they'll switch, so that the other member of the pair can tell his or her own story.
7. After both members of the pairs have described their pleasant experiences, ring the bell again to signal that they're now to take turns describing their unpleasant experiences. They'll follow exactly the same procedure they followed in describing their pleasant experiences.

**Debrief (this is an abbreviated version of Thiagi's six-step debriefing process):**

- Ask them to describe, in one word, what it felt like to describe a pleasant or unpleasant experience by bringing their attention only to their emotions, thoughts and physical sensations. If most of their responses are negative ("difficult," "anxiety-producing," "weird," "awkward"), ask if anyone experienced positive emotions in as they focused their attentions on their emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations. If nobody responds to

this question, ask the group “to shift their frame” and identify some positive things they experienced here.

- Ask them what they’ve learned here (encourage them to respond here with more than one word). What are the advantages and disadvantages of focusing on our thoughts, emotions and physical sensations, rather than describing largely, or entirely, in the ways we normally describe?
- What’s the relationship between this activity and what happens in the real world?
- How might practicing what we’ve experienced and started to learn here—bringing our attention to our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations—impact our lives?

## Related Tools:

*Tools to use in conjunction with this lesson:*

- [25 Questions](#)
- [6 Differences](#)
- [Brief Mindfulness Practice](#)
- [Five Minute Breathing](#)
- [Green Monkey](#)
- [Three Minute Breathing](#)

*Similar tools:*

- [Are You Listening?](#)
- [Bridging Behaviors](#)
- [Life Without Questions Or No Questions, Please!](#)
- [Listening Deeply for Values](#)
- [Picture Storytelling](#)