

Introduction:

This activity is inspired by an Instagram account called Barbie Savior. Barbie Savior calls attention to the issues with the well-intentioned—but often problematic—"voluntourism," i.e. short-term volunteer trips. Barbie Savior parodies the voluntourism experience by placing Barbie in various scenes across Africa along with tone deaf captions that demonstrate Barbie's lack of knowledge about her impact as a "voluntourist."

In this activity, participants will analyze one of Barbie Savior's posts in terms of the concept of empathy. Participants will then attempt to coach Barbie on intercultural empathy and how she might consider different perspectives.

Objectives:

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

1. Articulate definitions of empathy and intercultural empathy.
2. Apply the concept of intercultural empathy to improve a problematic situation.

Time:

1 hour.

Group Size:

Entire Group.

Materials:

An image from the Barbie Savior Instagram account (in [Links](#)); computer/tablet and projector to show image. Optional: white board and dry erase markers.

Facilitator note: The image provided in Links was originally chosen because it is less condescending than other images in the account. However, you may select a different image if they would like.

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:

Mentorship & Leadership; Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion.

Activity Instructions:

1. Begin with a discussion on empathy. Ask participants the following questions:

- How do you define empathy?
- What do you think are the qualities of an empathetic person?

Facilitator note: You may consider writing key words from participants' responses on a white board, if possible.

2. Next, introduce the concept of intercultural empathy. Use the AAC&U VALUE rubric definition, which is as follows:

- Benchmark (1): Views the experience of others but does so through own cultural worldview.
- Milestone (2): Identifies components of other cultural perspectives but responds in all situations with own worldview.
- Milestone (3): Recognizes intellectual and emotional dimensions of more than one worldview and sometimes uses more than one worldview in interactions.
- Capstone (4): Interprets intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview and demonstrates ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

3. Ask participants the following questions:

- Do you notice any similarities or differences between your definitions of empathy and the AAC&U's definition?
- Why is it important that we distinguish between empathy and intercultural empathy?

4. Bring up the Barbie Savior image on the projector. Read the image's description out loud to the participants.



5. Then, ask participants the following questions:

- What do you think was Barbie's mindset when she took this picture and wrote this caption? What were her intentions?
- What are the issues surrounding her mindset? Why might her current viewpoint be problematic?
- Using the AAC&U rubric's definition of intercultural empathy, what might we say to Barbie to help her approach this situation differently?