



# The Keys to a Civil Society—

## Diversity

## Tolerance

## Respect

## Consensus

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In the next four issues of the *Forum*, the Civic Education section will focus on issues that help to define or promote a civil society. The four main issues we will address are considered keys in building and maintaining a civil society: diversity, tolerance, respect, and consensus. Each issue will be dealt with in a separate article. We hope to provide readers with content-rich material and interesting exercises for the EFL class that will help students not only to improve their English but also better understand their place in the world's society.

### Diversity

As we have read about or experienced in our own lives, the advances in technology and transportation are creating a more mobile and global community. The global economy is building a new network of relationships between peoples and countries. People from all walks of life and all cultures are connecting with each other on a daily basis. For example, 148 million people worldwide are communicating across borders via the Internet.<sup>1</sup> With the changes in populations due to the effects of climate, disease, and violent conflicts, as well as the changes in life expectancy, traditional institutions and the world's labor force are evolving. In many industrialized countries the workforce is aging. In the United States, for example, by the year 2006 the largest increases in the workforce will be in the age bracket from 45 to 64.<sup>2</sup> Such barriers as those between the young and the old, male and female,

1. Source: NUA Internet Survey

2. Source: November 1997 Monthly Labor Review



and prejudices against individual groups such as the physically impaired are increasing being challenged.

Because of these changes and the growing globalization, diversity is an issue that pervades every society. It is something that has impact on every person and so it is an issue that needs to be addressed. The most common subjects related to diversity center around race, color, gender, religion, and economic status. Many other related subjects are also often considered such as education, language, physical abilities, age, and culture. Diversity even relates to more specific subjects such as personal preferences.

The definition of diversity in many dictionaries emphasizes *differences* in the state or condition of something (a species, group, organization, etc.). These dictionaries, however, also state the element of *variety* in their second or third definition. Until recently, the focus has been primarily on the differences part of the definition.

Throughout history, peoples and societies generally tended toward a more homogeneous approach in their development and were often afraid of or prejudiced against differences. Standards and norms were established according to the beliefs of the dominant group(s) or culture(s). National identities used to be developed on the principle of sameness—sameness of ethnic origin, sameness of language, sameness of religion, and so on. Laws were created to exclude or even punish certain differences. Groups and societies saw anyone (or group) that was different as being automatically suspect and often inferior. Civil wars and world wars have been fought over issues relating to diversity.

With the quickly expanding concept and realization of more interrelated communities, nations and societies have begun to focus more on the variety that diversity brings. It is becoming more evident that differences can add value and quality. For example, Western medicine is beginning to accept such Eastern alternatives as acupuncture. The world science community is extremely appreciative of the contributions of British physicist Stephen W. Hawking, whose intelligence and personality eclipse his physical disabilities. And breaking the age discrimination barrier, U.S. astronaut and Senator John Glenn made his second voyage into space at the age of 77 in order to conduct various experiments related to age. Today's generations are beginning to look for or build common threads around which differences can exist in harmony and the values in the differences can be shared. The concept of sameness is being replaced with unity. This could be a legacy of the twentieth century.

This change in view, however, is not coming easily to the world. Many long-standing prejudices and practices counter to diversity still exist in all societies. Education is one of the keys to diminishing the prejudices against diversity. Awareness is the first step in the process. Helping students to become aware of the diversity around them and to recognize the value in that diversity is key to building a strong civil society.

The following section looks at some subjects related to diversity and proposes some activities to help build students' awareness on these subjects. Not all activities need to be explicit. Sometimes, just creating an environment in which diversity is noted and tolerance and respect are observed is enough to instill awareness.

## Gender

The age-old battle of the sexes is a major subject under diversity. Equality between the sexes is still a relatively new concept in some societies (women did not have the right to vote in the United States until 1920). Stereotyping is a form of prejudice and many people stereotype what is expected of a woman and what is expected of a man.

### Activity: Gender Stereotypes

1. Have each student read the following lists (either from the blackboard or an overhead slide, or give each student his or her own copy of the lists to work with). Ask them to write the word *male*, *female*, or *both* beside each word or phrase in each list according to whether they think that word refers primarily to a man or a woman, or refers equally to both. If they do not know or understand a word or phrase, ask them to guess. As they finish each list, have the students cover that list and go on to the next one. They may not go back to a previous list. Give them either 50 seconds per list, or 2.5 minutes in which to complete all three lists.

2. After they have completed their lists, work with one list at a time, beginning with professions. If the class is small, work as a whole group. If the class is large, work in small groups (odd numbers are better in case there is a tie—no more than five to a group). Ask the students to share the information and explain why they made the selection they did, even if they guessed (have dictionaries ready so they can look up new vocabulary). Note the instances in which the majority of the class agreed on the same gender for an item. Discuss why this is so. Discuss instances in which that item might apply to the other gender or to both genders equally. Have the students compare their answers from one list to the other and discuss any differences (for example, if in one list they put *male* after the word *cook*, but in another list they put *female* after the word *cooking*).

3. As a follow-up activity or conclusion, have the students find some pictures showing men and women doing work that has stereotypically been considered done by the opposite gender. Let them create captions for the pictures (in English) and put the pictures up on the classroom walls. Try to keep the pictures up for a least a week. If you have too many for the allotted wall space, rotate them.



## The three lists:

<b>Professions:</b>	<b>Activities:</b>	<b>Personality or Character Traits:</b>
Cook	sewing	shy
Mechanic	hammering	aggressive
Gymnast	writing a letter	inflexible
Teacher	serving dinner	emotional
Clergy	grading exams	athletic
Director	washing dishes	graceful
Cabinet Minister	giving a public speech	impersonal
Mayor	hiring an employee	strict
Author	reading a book	moody
Colonel	acting	romantic
Chef	ironing	curious
Professor	writing a song	talkative
Construction Worker	giving an injection	formal
Dishwasher	singing	family-oriented
Laundry Professional	giving instructions to a jury	methodical
Elementary School Principal	running for an elected office	sensitive
Marathon Runner	restoring an engine	argumentative
Novelist	drawing a blueprint	creative
Nurse	cooking a roast	social
Judge	conducting an orchestra	articulate
Surgeon	performing open-heart surgery	unorganized
Lawyer	driving a forklift	deceitful
Heavy Equipment Operator	flying a jet	jealous
Composer	running a marathon	smooth
Dance Instructor	commanding a squad	inspirational
Drummer	giving a sermon	commanding
Manager	preparing to vault for the Olympics	conniving
Architect	giving dictation to a secretary	careful
Pilot	babysitting	loving
Athlete	holding a black belt in karate	disciplined

## Ethnic Origin

In many countries around the world, the dominant culture sets the standards and norms for day-to-day living. People who are not directly or inherently part of the dominant culture find themselves stereotyped and victims of prejudice when it comes to jobs, educational opportunities, housing, and so forth. Members of the subcultures are often assumed to belong to certain professions such as banking, gold trading, laundry, real estate, teaching, or music. If you find yourself in one of these subcultures, breaking out of the stereotype may be difficult unless you are extraordinarily gifted.

## Posters

This activity is an example of a nonexplicit activity used to develop awareness. It can be done either by the teacher or a small group of students from the class. The preparation should take place outside of the class.

Think of the professions that are commonly associated with members of the dominant culture. Create a collage (a collection of pictures from magazines, journals, scrapbooks, etc.) of known members of the subculture who have successfully held or hold positions in those professions. Create a second collage of known members of the dominant culture who have successfully held or hold positions in professions stereotypically held by members of the subcultures.

Put the two collages up on a wall in the classroom. Beside or under each collage, put a small notebook for students to write comments in. At the beginning of class the day the collages are put up, take three to five minutes to explain the concept of the collages. Invite the students to look at them before or after class or on their breaks, and to write their comments about the collages in the books (in English). Leave the collages up for two weeks.

An extra activity with the collages is to have students who finish in-class assignments early (e.g., tests, silent reading, etc.) write a reaction (in English) to the collages in their journals or on a separate piece of paper (not for a grade but possibly for an extra half-point credit on the assignment). Again, the purpose is to increase the students' awareness of the diversity around them.

The following is an example of a collage. The subject of this sample collage is "Generations."



## Age

In some cultures age is a virtue, while in others it may seem to be a curse. We all find that as we get older, certain things are expected of us. Many older people feel themselves discriminated against in areas such as work, housing, and sports. With the average age of populations around the world increasing and health care improving, many countries are finding that the expectations and laws regarding age need to be reconsidered.

### Survey

To raise students' awareness about the prejudices regarding age, have the students complete the following questionnaire. Give them 20 minutes to answer the questions. Discuss their answers either as a whole class or in groups.

1. At what age should people stop learning or studying? Why?
2. At what age should people stop working, retire? Why?  
Is it the same for men and women?
3. At what age is somebody considered an adult? Why?  
Is it the same for men and women?
4. At what age is somebody considered old or elderly? Why?
5. Consider a normal, healthy person who is 24 years old and a normal, healthy person of the same gender who is 50 years old.
  - A. List ten things the 24-year-old can do that the 50-year-old cannot. Be able to explain why.
  - B. List ten things the 50-year-old can do that the 24-year-old cannot. Be able to explain why.
  - C. List ten things that the two can do together. Be able to explain why.
  - D. List ten things the two should not do together because of age. Be able to explain why.
6. Is there a direct relationship between age and wisdom? What is it?
7. What is the generation gap? Give examples.

For an extended assignment, ask the students to interview a couple of relatives and neighbors (different ages) using the same questions. Have them prepare either an oral or written report summarizing the interviews and drawing conclusions regarding people's attitudes toward age.



## **Adapting the Activities**

These activities can be adapted to fit most intermediate and advanced classes. The major factors to consider are time and vocabulary.

For the gender exercise, the lists can be shortened for time consideration, or words changed according to the students' vocabulary aptitude. The most important thing is to keep the activity list and the professions list parallel. For example, if in the professions list you have *cook*, do not remove *cooking* from the activities list. The personality traits list should reflect traits (positive and negative) you would associate with the professions listed.

For the ethnic origin activity, there is no real need to adapt this except possibly to have bilingual and monolingual (English) dictionaries close by so students can look up words they would like to use in describing their reactions to the collages.

For the age activity, students can be allowed to conduct their interviews in their native language but must report their findings (either in writing or orally) in English. To save time, the number of items requested for each of the lists in question 5 can be reduced to four or five.