

Step 1.

What is a perspective, why do we need one?

This lesson introduces the idea of a perspective. If you ask your students what is meant by the word *perspective*, they are likely to understand that it means *point of view*. If you ask them how a point of view is attained, they are likely to say, “Through personal experience.” What they may not see until it is pointed out, is that their perspectives are derived from experiences that reflect the cultural norms of their family’s beliefs, traditions, race and/or ethnicity and socio-economic status.

A main tenet of *TfC* is that complex social problems are best solved by diverse groups who bring together varied points of view, expertise and experiences. As you go through the process of engaging your students in activities that highlight their engagement and perspectives, they will begin to develop the understanding of why this is so. What follows then, are concepts and exercises that will help them understand the lenses that comprise each individual’s perspective and how, as a team, bringing their perspectives together strengthens their capabilities as problem solvers. Our objectives are to help students gain understandings of:

- a) how a perspective is formed
- b) the value of groups with multiple perspectives when it comes to problem solving.

To develop a nuanced understanding of what it means to have a perspective, we start by telling our students:

“When you’re 15, 16, 17 years old most of the time you don’t want to be different or stand out.” (Then, give an example from your own life – or use this one, which is from Bill’s life.)

“Just before I drop off my sixteen-year old daughter at her high school she turns off the radio. Taste in music is personal enough that it can be used to label someone and put them in a box. This is especially true in high school. So, she turns the radio off as way to avoid the “awkwardness”—that is her word not mine-- of being the one getting out of a car with “her music” blaring from the radio. Some kids might think her music is awful and she will be embarrassed. Nobody—especially in high school-- wants to be that person, to stand out.

That isn't the case with research! The great thing about research is that it is an activity in which you—all of us--WANT TO BE DIFFERENT FROM EVERYBODY ELSE. Engaging in research is all about being oneself and having one's own story. That special point of view which each of us has is called a perspective.”

What is a perspective?

- 1) A perspective is a distinct point of view. A perspective provides a lens by which to see the world, much like a pair of glasses, which makes one's vision clear.
 - a. Perspectives are **distinctive** to each person. Just as each person has their own eye-glass prescription based on their eyes, each person has their own perspective based on their race, income, cultural heritage and the experiences that have shaped their life. Just as no two eye-glass prescriptions are exactly the same, no two perspectives are exactly the same.
 - b. A perspective is formed by the circumstances and experiences that have shaped a person's life and how we make sense of these things. While perspectives are shaped by the past, they are most helpful when used as a light to guide to where one is going in the present and the future.

- c. Ask your students to reflect on and answer (verbally in pair-shares or in writing):
 - i. What shaped me?
 - ii. What made me who I am?
 - iii. What is behind the things I say to myself as I sit in class?
 - iv. Why do I see things the way I do?

We tell our students:

“We (the teacher AND the students) are depending on one another to use our perspectives, skills and abilities to help us address a community challenge. While awareness of one’s perspective gives one insight from a particular standpoint, all of us need each other to add their viewpoints. This is how we understand a problem.”

Later, as research unfolds, you may refer back to this mini-lesson in a variety of ways to create a thematic reference point. For example: Ask your students:

- “Do you have a point view that can help us make sure our research question includes as many people’s experiences as possible?
 - Are our survey questions reflective and respectful of your perspective?
 - Do you have knowledge or skills that would be useful—i.e. are you good at talking to people?”
- 2) It is important to be aware of the varied perspectives present in a class or research team so that students understand why they think the way they do and why they draw the conclusions they do. This awareness also makes it easier for individuals to understand that a particular perspective is just one way of seeing a problem. Situations and issues may look very different to students depending on their lenses. Indeed, what counts as a problem to one student, is just reality to another. Additionally, an awareness of the limits

of any one lens or perspective helps students to guard against: 1) making interview questions, data fit a single perspective or 2) expecting others, especially research subjects, to share one of our perspectives when they talk to us.

- 3) We need all the distinctive perspectives in the class to shape our research, make it meaningful in the classroom community and improve the lives of others.
- 4) Finally, even as our own lens allows us to see, it also limits what we can see. These limits and biases are sometimes blind spots, blind spots that a diversity of perspectives can help identify and overcome. But only if we willing to acknowledge our own limits.
- 5) **HERE IS THE PRIMARY LEARNING OBJECTIVE IN THIS MINI-LESSON:**
Enduring solutions to community challenges rarely happen unless people from different backgrounds work collaboratively.

