



Classroom Connections

Research Project: Privilege Walk Guide for Teachers

“We need to have the courage to look at our past. We need to have the courage to look at where we are now. And we need to work together to figure out how we can collectively heal moving forward.”

- Nikki Sanchez

Note to teachers: The benefit of this exercise is that it allows students to embody their privilege and marginalization and to see inequality of our social system and their varying positions in it in a concrete way. However, this takes the risk of making participants disclose their identities to others, which may make them feel insecure or uncomfortable. This exercise is appropriate if participants have a good rapport with one another and are ready to take some risks to explore their identities in depth.

Part 1. Introduction

What to expect from this exercise – In this exercise, you are asked to respond to questions based on your life experiences. At the end of the exercise, we will see people with different levels of privilege in this room. Regardless of how privileged or underprivileged you are, you may find the experience very uncomfortable, and it may trigger challenging feelings, such as shame, guilt, fear, and anger.

Limitations of the exercise – All aspects of your identity and their intricate intersectionality may not be fully addressed in this exercise. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that what we see as a result of this exercise is not complete and absolute. There is likely to be a lot more complexity to what we see in the room at the end of the exercise.

The purpose of the exercise – The reason why we do this exercise as a group, instead of individually, despite these challenges and limitations, is to understand how we are positioned in a social structure and to reflect on how different aspects of our social identity shape our everyday experience, including our relationship with one another. We are born and socialized into the social structure, and we tend to see the structure and our relationships in it as “normal.” However uncomfortable it may be, uncovering the structure and the social positions we occupy in it in a tangible and personal way is a necessary learning process in order for us to engage with critical and productive analysis and reflection.

Part 2. Instructions

- Stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the same direction in a straight line without speaking
- Listen carefully to each statement, and take the step required if the statement applies to you. If a statement is not relevant to you, stand still.
- Try to be honest as possible, but if you do not wish to respond or feel uncomfortable, you do not have to move
- To interpret each statement, think about your background or a group of people you identify with, such as race, class, ethnicity, ancestry, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and/or dis/ability.
- Some of you may have lived in different places. Unless the statement is about your circumstances while you were growing up, think whether the statement applies to your current life situation.
- You are not allowed to speak or look back during the activity





Part 3. Walk

- If you see a group of people you identify with widely represented in the media, take one step forward
- If your native language is not English, please take one step back.
- If you were ever called names because of your background, take one step back.
- If you have ever felt as though you were a feared, inferior, or unwanted member of society, please take one step back.
- If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, or to gain more credibility, take one step back.
- If you are taught the culture and history of your ancestors in school, take one step forward.
- If you were raised witnessing violence, addiction to drugs or alcohol, prostitution, or crime, take one step back.
- If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy you food when you were growing up, take one step back.
- If you were ever denied access to academics or jobs because of your background, take one step back.
- If you were encouraged by your parents to attend college, take one step forward.
- If you were raised in a single-parent household, take one step back.
- If your family owned the house where you grew up, take one step forward.
- If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear or ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
- If you were ever offended by a joke or remark about people you identify with, but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take a step back.
- If you felt or were told that you should work twice as hard as others to succeed in school or career because of your background, take a step back.
- If you are the first person in your family to receive university education, take a step back.
- If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
- If you are never asked to speak on behalf of a group of people who share an identity with you, take one step forward.
- If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to flaws in your racial or gender group, take one step forward.

Part 3. Debriefing

Some large group discussion/reflection questions to consider:

1. What happened?
 - a. What do you see around the room? Who do you see in front, middle, and back?
 - b. How does this exercise inform who is in the room and who is not?
2. What were your thoughts and feelings as you did this exercise?
 - a. How do you feel about where you are relative to other people in the room?
 - b. What went through your mind as you moved forward and backward?
 - c. Which of the statements did you find surprising or unexpected? Why?





- d. Which of the statements made you feel uncomfortable or hurt? Why?
 - e. Which of the statements you felt unsure whether it applies to you or not? Why?
 - f. What would you add to the list of the statements, or which of the statements would you phrase differently?
3. How did this exercise inform your social position and experience?
 - a. How has your social position (i.e., your privileged or marginalized position in society based on your social group membership) affected you, your family, and your community, in terms of opportunity and access?
 - b. What does your position in the room say about societal messages about your worth and the worth of people with similar privilege levels?
 4. How have your privileges and under-privileges been shaped by history?
 - a. Which of the privileges did you inherit from your family? For inherited privileges, how far does the privilege go back in your family tree?
 - b. How might your privileges or under-privileges today have been different if anything in your family history had been different? What could have been different?
 5. How does this exercise make you think differently about your own identities, daily experience, or relationships with other people?
 - a. Reflecting back on this activity and new perspectives you may have gained, is there anything you might consider acting upon or doing differently from now on?
 - b. How does this exercise make you think about your social responsibility? How might you engage in the responsibility individually or collectively?

Modifications:

<http://www.differencematters.info/uploads/pdf/privilege-beads-exercise.pdf>

<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>

Optional:

If participants are unfamiliar with the concepts of privilege and marginalization or have limited or no experience with exploring their social identities: <http://timeandplace.ubc.ca/files/2014/06/Appendix-2.pdf>

Note: This exercise was adopted from Experiences Canada (<https://experiencescanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Activity-1-EN-Privilege-Walk.pdf>) and UBC Peer Program Training Modules: Diversity & Intercultural Communication 2008/09.

