

The Paseo or Circles of Identity

Result of collaborative work by Debbi Laidley of the UCLA School Management Program, with Debbie Bambino, Debbie McIntyre, Stevi Quate, and Juli Quinn. Created at the Winter Meeting, 2001.

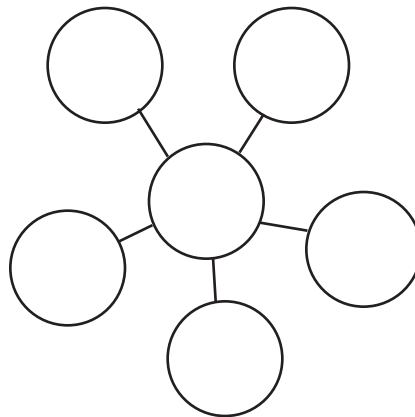
Purpose

When a group would like to examine issues of identity, diversity, beliefs, and values, and would like to begin making connections between who they are and how that shapes their decisions and behaviors, the Paseo can be a tool for initiating the dialogue. It is essentially a 2-step process, which begins with individual reflection and then moves into personal storytelling. This is a flexible process, in that the theme of the questions and prompts can be tailored to meet the objectives of the group.

Note: We have been told that The Paseo is a process that has been used in Mexico and the Southwest United States as a way of getting acquainted quickly. Traditionally, males and females of the community would line up in concentric circles, facing one another, and would make “un paseo,” or pass by one another, holding eye contact and having brief opportunities to make connections.

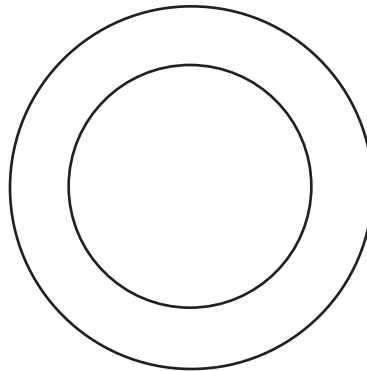
Process

1. Each participant makes/draws a web of circles, roughly resembling the diagram of a molecule. (The facilitator may chart one as a model, with each participant creating his own on a journal page or note pad.) The basic design looks something like this:



2. Within this diagram, each group member should write his or her name in the center circle. Each additional circle should contain a word or phrase that captures some element of her/his identity — those terms or descriptors that have most helped shape who the person is and how she/he interacts in the world. Some groups will move right into this; others will prefer to have the facilitator model what is intended. For example, one circle might contain the word “woman,” another the word “black,” another the phrase “grew up in Deep South,” and so on. As an additional step, participants may be asked to include words or phrases that other people use to identify them. This may be done in a different color, or in pencil rather than in ink.

3. The entire group now moves to stand in a large open area, forming 2 concentric circles, in preparation for the dialogue portion of this process. Some group members will prefer to take their notepads with them. An even number of people is necessary, since the dialogue takes place in pairs. The outer circle faces inward while the inner circle faces outward. The circles should look something like this:



The facilitator will now begin to ask the group to think about and respond to a series of questions. Important instructions to provide before the questioning starts are:

- Once the question has been stated, everyone will be allowed 1 minute to think about her/his own response to the question. This is intended to ensure that each person is fully listening to her/his partner during the dialogue process, without being distracted by a desire to plan a response when her/his turn to speak begins.
 - At the end of the 1-minute thinking time, the facilitator will announce the beginning of the round of dialogue. Each person will take turns responding, **without interruption**, to the question or prompt, with 2 minutes allotted for each. *If the speaker does not take 2 minutes, the full time should be allowed, being comfortable with the silence.* The facilitator will call time at the 2-minute point, when the pairs should make sure the second partner gets a chance to speak for a full 2 minutes, without interruption.
 - At the end of the second partner's time, the facilitator will ask the group members to thank their current partner, and say goodbye. Either the inner or the outer circle will be asked to shift to the left or right. (Groups may want to shift 1-3 persons to the right or left, to mix the partners more quickly). Participants should take a moment to greet their new partners.
 - The next round of dialogue will begin, with a new question, and with the 1 minute thinking time. The process continues through each round of questions or prompts.
4. Debrief the process. It is important not to shortchange this step. One way to begin the debrief is to ask the group to take a few minutes to do a quick-write on what they saw, heard, and felt during this process. After the quick-write, do a round robin sharing (30 seconds or less) of what each participant observed. They should provide "just the facts" without inference, interpretation, or judgment. Proceed from there to a more open debrief discussion. Possibly close the debrief with reflection time on one of the following prompts:
- What will you do differently as a result of engaging in this dialogue?
 - How will you process the emotions that surfaced for you as a result of this dialogue?
 - How might you adapt and use this activity?

Suggested Questions or Prompts for Step 3

Order of questions should be carefully considered. Since the prompts focus on personal experiences, the emotions initially tied to those experiences are likely to resurface. It's generally a good idea to vary the depth of the questioning, and to never start with the deepest possible questions.

- With which descriptors do you identify most strongly? Why is that?
- With which descriptors do others identify you most strongly? How do you feel about that?
- Describe a time when one of the elements of your identity definitely worked to your advantage, either in your educational experience or in other areas of your life.
- Describe a time when one of the elements of your identity appeared to hold you back, either in your educational experience or in other areas of your life.
- Talk about a time when your perceptions of a student's identity caused you to do something that held her/him back.
- Talk about a time when your perceptions of a student's identity caused you to do something that moved her/him forward.
- Talk about a time your identity heightened your awareness of an inequity.
- Talk about a time your identity diminished, lessened, or obscured your awareness of an inequity.

Some Ideas to Consider:

- Before starting the questioning, decide if you want to include an instruction that people should choose to share either the most significant memory that comes to mind, or a memory that, though perhaps less significant, they feel more comfortable sharing. (Some participants have expressed a preference for hearing this instruction; others have said that they did that kind of internal editing themselves quite naturally.)
- Participants should not pass!
- Decide if you want to include any instructions regarding the demeanor of the listener. For example, whether or not clarifying questions are okay; whether or not the listener should provide affirmative sounds, body language, and other cues, or should listen as simply a mirror — devoid of reaction. Your intent, and your knowledge of the group, will guide this.
- Be very aware of the emotional and physical energy level of the group. Because each round takes about 6 minutes, most groups cannot sustain this activity for more than 6-7 questions. Some people may need a chair stationed within the circle that doesn't move.
- Decide the amount of rotation you will use. For some purposes, you may want to have people stay with the same partner for a pair of questions. Sometimes it may make sense to move more than one person to the right, or to move both the inner and outer circle at the same time, in different directions.