



## Overview

THEME	TIME	MATERIALS	SETUP
NOW	40 MINUTES	(SEE BELOW)	CIRCLE OF CHAIRS

**Topic:** The difference between describing, interpreting, and evaluating a situation or event and the importance of using each approach intentionally

**Audience:** Adolescents through adults who are engaged in community change-making

**Conceptual Objective:** Participants will understand that people interpret the same situation differently. We want to recognize when we're applying subjective interpretation or evaluation to a situation and avoid presenting interpretations as absolute truths, especially if those interpretations may be harmful to others. We also want to become more conscious of why we interpret things the way we do.

**Experiential Objective:** Participants will experience description, interpretation, and evaluation and learn to recognize the difference between each. They may also appreciate that having multiple perspectives can enhance our insights and creativity.

**Facilitator Prep:** Perform the exercise yourself. Consider possible examples of description, interpretation, and evaluation.

**Related Content:** This session could be a good complement to Danger of a Single Story workshop.

**Materials:** Pens, paper, handout (or computer and projector to show the image), and white board or flipchart.

## Procedure

### INTRODUCTIONS (3 MIN)

- Presenters introduce themselves, then participants introduce themselves to a neighbor.

### AGREEMENTS (5 MIN)

- Invite group to suggest agreements to create a safe discussion environment. They may include:
  1. Stay engaged. (Remove distractions.)
  2. Speak your truth. (Talk about your own self, life, and story, rather than those of others.)
  3. Experience discomfort. (Stay in the conversation, even when you are uncomfortable.)
  4. Expect/accept non-closure. (Some things will remain unclear.)
  5. Ouch! (We may feel hurt by what we hear – please speak up when this happens.)

### OPENING (5 MIN)

Set the stage and introduce the topic, perhaps including:

As we come together to make change on an issue we care about, it is important to recognize that everyone involved may see the situation differently. We want to recognize when we're applying subjective interpretation or evaluation to a situation and avoid presenting interpretations as absolute truths, especially if those interpretations may be harmful to others. We also want to become more conscious of why we interpret things the way we do—and to see the value of multiple perspectives.

### VIEW & WRITE (5 MIN)

- Make sure all participants have a piece of paper and a pen.
- Display the picture of the “woman with the box on her head” (<http://mncampuscompact.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2016/10/Whats-Happening-Here-Image.png>).
- Tell the participants to “describe the picture, using as much detail as possible.” Working alone, they should take a few minutes to write down their descriptions.

## SHARE (5 MIN)

- ❑ Ask for volunteers to share words and phrases from their descriptions with the larger group. Write key words and phrases on the white board or a flipchart. (Try to keep this moving with a lot of contributions.)
- ❑ Hopefully, there will be some very different statements about the picture. Tell participants that this is one of the purposes of this activity. When we see how differently people respond to the same picture, we can start to see the difference between **describing** and **interpreting**.
- ❑ Go through the list and ask participants to identify statements that are descriptive (“what you see”) versus statements that are interpretive (“what you think you see”). Some statements may even be **evaluative** (“how you feel about or judge what you think you see”).
- ❑ Ask the participants for a show of hands: how many included in their description that this picture was of a “family”? Ask why they thought that, and point out that they are applying cultural constructions of a family to a picture of unknown people. It’s a natural human tendency, but one we need to understand when working in community.

## APPLY (5 MIN)

This step is appropriate for groups and individuals relatively well-versed in their issue area.

- ❑ Consider the issue or field you’re involved with. Are there aspects of the issue that members of the general public misunderstand or disagree on? (Example: the education “achievement gap” or “opportunity gap”)
- ❑ Find a partner and discuss: How do some people evaluate or interpret what is going on with your issue or field? What are they getting wrong?
- ❑ Ask the full group: What harm is there in this?
- ❑ When we interpret and evaluate without acknowledging it, we erase other possible interpretations, other people’s experiences, and other possible paths forward.

“What’s Happening Here?” is adapted by Minnesota Campus Compact staff based on the “Community Involvement in Practice” workshop developed by the University of Minnesota Center for Community Engaged Learning. The agreements in this workshop have been adapted from Glen Singleton’s *Courageous Conversations*.

We welcome your suggestions for improving this guide further for future trainings. We also welcome you to use it and adapt it for your own trainings, subject to the terms below.

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## COMMIT TO ACT (5 MIN)

- ❑ Discuss: what can we do? Steps you might share:
  - a. Be explicit about whether you’re describing or interpreting.
  - b. Seek out multiple perspectives on issues to deepen your understanding of them.
  - c. Offer alternative interpretations when others present damaging interpretations.
  - d. If someone else is presenting interpretation as fact, ask questions that help them recognize the difference.

## CLOSING (5 MIN)

Going around circle, ask each participant to share one word reflecting how they are feeling now. If you have additional time, ask each person to share one take-away (e.g., a lesson, a specific commitment to action).



# Survey for "What's Happening Here" Workshop

Thank you for taking time to attend this Civic Agency workshop. We are very interested in receiving your feedback. (Alternatively, you may also complete this survey online at <http://tinyurl.com/ja28zek>). If you have participants complete evaluations on paper, please scan them and send them to [info@mncampuscompact.org](mailto:info@mncampuscompact.org).

## Your information

**Primary Role:** Student, Faculty, Staff, Administrator, Community Organization Staff, AmeriCorps/VISTA

**Institution** (College, University, Organization):

**Date:**

**Please indicate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following about your experience with the Civic Agency workshop you participated in.**

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
I feel capable of using the tools and exercises I learned about					
The tools and exercises I learned about are valuable					
I increased my confidence in my own ability to lead					
I gained useful leadership skills, strategies, or insights					
I learned about new leadership tools or resources					
I developed new or deeper connections with others					
I both learned from and contributed to the learning of others					
Other participants in the workshop helped me see things from a different perspective					

**Please indicate how strongly you agree/disagree with each of the following statements about yourself before the workshop**

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Before the Workshop</b>										
I understood my own identities and cultures										
I understood how identities and culture matter in social/community change work										
I understood how I connect with social issues on a personal level										
I was aware of strategies for fostering collaboration in diverse groups										
I was aware of strategies for effectively leading others										
I was aware of strategies for developing an action plan for social/community change										
I believed I had power to address social/community issues										

Please indicate how strongly you agree/disagree with each of the following statements about yourself now:

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>After the Workshop</b>										
I understand my own identities and cultures										
I understand how identities and culture matter in social/community change work										
I understand how I connect with social issues on a personal level										
I am aware of strategies for fostering collaboration in diverse groups										
I am aware of strategies for effectively leading others										
I am aware of strategies for developing an action plan for social/community change										
I believe I have power to address social/community issues										

Is there anything you would like to tell us about your experience with the workshop?