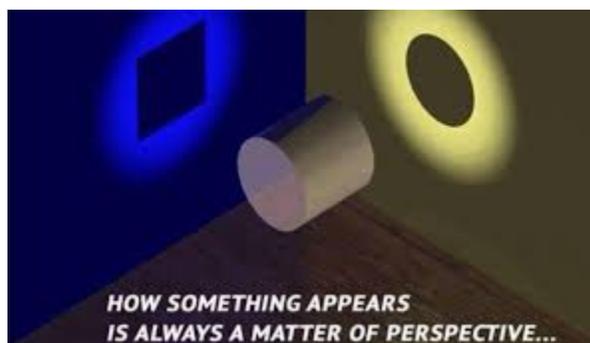


## Perspectives: An Engaging Approach to Foster Critical Thinking



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**Learning objectives/skills fostered:** (1) Helping students actively listen to information being presented. (2) Having student consider multiple perspectives and frameworks from which to understand and critique the theory being presented. (3) Foregrounding the impact of the theory on different populations

**How/why is this a culturally relevant teaching practice, high impact teaching (HIP) or high operational practice (HOP from Pedagogy of Confidence framework)?**

This technique fosters the culturally relevant teaching practice of **situating learning into the lives of students**. It allows students to consider the course content from various frames of reference, and to contribute from a perspective relevant to their identity.

**Learning challenge addressed:** Introducing feminist theories or movements. May be applicable to many other social theories, histories, political issues, laws, etc.

**Context best used for:** This technique can be adapted for any size class.

**Materials needed:** Creating "perspective" labels ahead of time to distribute to students.

**What to do/ how to do it:**

- 1. Create "perspective" labels before class:** Depending on the course content you are teaching, think about different populations who might be affected by the theory and make a label for various members of those populations (e.g., various stakeholders or people left out by the theory). I use this exercise when teaching "Liberal Feminism" because it is often critiqued for ignoring women of color and working class women. Some of my "perspective labels" include labels like:
  - You are Chicana – organizing about the farmworkers union – 1960's – Southern California
  - You are a suburban white, housewife... living in Indianapolis – 1950s
  - You are 1<sup>st</sup> generation – Chinese woman – working class - living in LA in 1969.
  - You are a Black Lesbian poet – 1990s – Boston
  - You are an upper-class white male – living in Chicago – 1980s.
  - You are an African American Male – living in New York City – 1980s

- You are a working class white woman – single mother – now facing the prospect of having to go on welfare. 1990s.
- You are an upper middle class, professional African American woman – 1990s
- You are a first generation college student - @ CSUN – early 1970s - Hawaiian.
- You are a Black radical activist – working class – Urban city – present day
- You are a White lesbian student – 20 years old – early 1970s
- You are a factory worker – 1960’s – living in Michigan.

\*repeating labels so that 2-3 students get the same “perspective” works too.

- 2. Distribute labels to students randomly before you start teaching the content:** You may distribute it by having students pick the label out of a bowl, or any such mechanism.
- 3. Instruct students to listen to the content/theory you are teaching from the perspective of the label they have picked:** Now students engage in your lecture at two different levels. First to understand it personally and secondly to critique it from their new “perspective.”
- 4. Debrief the theory you taught from various perspectives:** Students should be instructed to always begin their comments by stating their label. They have to stay in character as they talk about the theory. So a student might say, “As a Black radical activist in present day America, I can see that even though liberal feminism helped changed laws, black people are still dying in our streets without any consequence to those who kill them.” Ask students to generate advantages and disadvantages of the theory from their assigned perspective.
- 5. Allow students to “shake off” the label they were given, and then debrief the content from their own perspective.** Usually students have a lot to say, now that they have seen different perspectives modeled for them.

### Alternative Options for Implementing

This can also be utilized as an activity to set up a class debate. Consider assigning fewer roles/perspectives in advance to students about an issue where there are clear divided opinions e.g., the 2016 bathroom law in North Carolina that says people must use the bathroom consistent with the sex as noted at birth, rather than the gender with which they identify.

In this case, I might assign students the following “perspectives”

1. Republican assemblyman introducing the law
2. Democratic assemblywoman against the law
3. Mayor of Charlotte (opposes the law)
4. Governor of North Carolina (for the law)
5. Transgender activist fighting the law
6. Parent of a trans teen who will be impacted by the law
7. Conservative parent of school-aged young girl (supporting the law)
8. Lawyer to uphold the law
9. Lawyer fighting against the law

Ask students to number off and each group of 1's is assigned the first "perspective", each group of 2's is assigned the second, and so on. Stage the argument with various groups arguing for and against, and perhaps forming alliances. Ask students to study the case and prepare to argue based on their perspective; either as an in-class activity or homework for a future class session.

This brings out deeper student understanding of various aspects of an issue. Finally debrief the content and the various perspectives and arguments that were generated.

**Tips for successfully implementing:**

Plan the labels in ways that help students engage with the theory, law or issue as stakeholders impacted most by the content you are teaching.

Get students to hold "character" or "perspective" long enough to pull out the various points of the content you are trying to teach. They will often generate the critique, or challenge the assumptions or worldview of the theory, because their "perspective" is forcing them to apply a different frame.

Don't skip step 5; this allows them to relate to the theory or content from their own lives.