

TEACHERS CORNER: SIMULATIONS

Culturally, economically, and socially diverse classrooms challenge teachers to foster more effective communication skills. Through using a combination of presentations, simulations, and debriefings, teams of students can use anthropology for collaborative problem-solving, thereby increasing their analytical and communication skills, as well as their personal relationship skills and competencies at handling cultural diversity.

PERSONAL CULTURE

One of the basic anthropological approaches that guides my teaching is **self-reflection**. Self-reflection is the active process of discovering, understanding, and defining one's own personal values, beliefs, thinking styles, and assumptions about reality, and is one effective means through which students can come to understand the anthropological concept of culture. I define personal culture as the organic complex or entirety of an individual's personal system of meaning: beliefs, values, perceptions,

assumptions, and explanatory frameworks about reality that underlie a person's behavior.

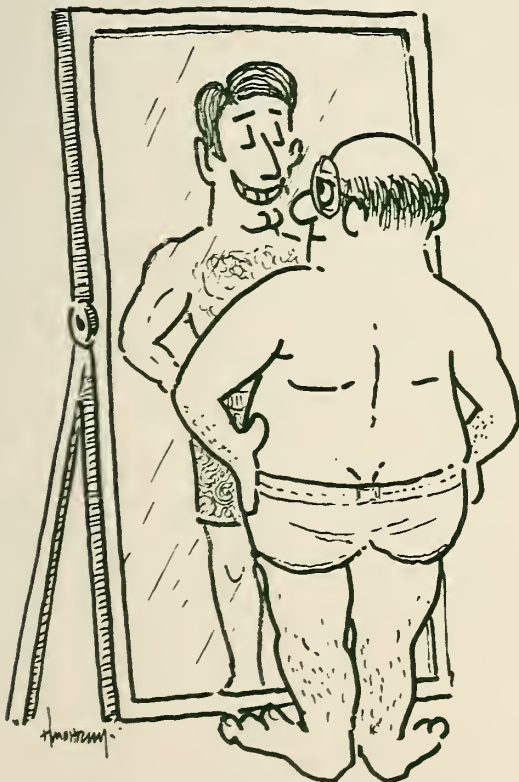
One's personal culture develops in the social interactions within one's family and within one's sociocultural milieu of community, work, school, affiliation groups and other local social organizations. One's personal culture can, of course, change over the course of one's lifetime, and is affected by the national culture and the various subcultures within which one lives.

Students need to understand how their personal culture and the cultures all around them influence their relationships with others. Interpersonal relationships demand effective communication, but this is difficult, particularly in multicultural contexts where people's personal cultures may be so different and so little understood by those engaged in the interaction.

Organizational or institutional culture is another level of culture I introduce to my students. Most of us live our daily lives within organizations. We need to understand more about the culture and social structure embodied in organizational policies, procedures, and programs, to become better problem-solvers and to communicate more effectively with others.

FOURTEEN COMPETENCIES

To enter into effective communication, and to build practical relationships with persons of diverse backgrounds and ways of behaving, it is helpful to strengthen certain personal competencies. Through engaging in simulations and debriefing exercises, students develop these competencies, and, in the process, increase their abilities for self-reflection and for understanding the personal, social, and organizational cultures in which they live. The 14 competencies described below include behaviors that enhance communication and relationships, and basic orientations to personal interactions with others, such as one's beliefs, values, and attitudes. Students can be encouraged to:



SELF REFLECTION

1. Personalize Observations: Recognize and accept that one's personal perceptions may not be shared by others; know and accept that 'my way is not the only way;' use 'I,' not 'you' messages.

2. Pay Attention to Your Feelings: Self-reflect on one's thoughts and feelings during an interaction.

3. Listen Carefully: Pay close attention to what is said, verbally and nonverbally.

4. Observe Attentively: Learn to understand meanings of nonverbal behavior.

5. Assume Complexity: Recognize multiple perspectives and outcomes.

6. Tolerate Ambiguity: Respond to unpredictable situations without stress.

7. Have Patience: Stay calm, stable, and persistent in difficult situations.

8. Manage Personal Biases: Treat people as individuals by recognizing that everyone belongs to many groups and that no one typifies a group.

9. Be Non-Judgemental: Not negatively judging others.

10. Be Flexible: Readjust quickly to changing situations.

11. Be Resourceful: Seek information about the cultures of those with whom you interact.

12. Have A Sense of Humor: Laugh at oneself and with others, not at others.

13. Show Respect: Behave in a respectful manner to those who are different.

14. Be Empathetic: Feel the thoughts, attitudes, and experiences of another.

Simulations that encourage these 14 competencies are active learning strategies that may include role playing and games. They provide students the opportunity to practice and apply their learning in the classroom environment. Simulations should include ample time for debriefing, a time when people who have shared a common experience discuss the meaning of that experience and its impact on the participants.

In all simulations, it is important to take students through a step-by-step approach: 1) introduce the simulation activity and its purpose, 2) define the roles that students will take, 3) train each person in his or her simulation role, 4) do the actual simulation with enough time for it to be fully

experienced, 5) debrief the experience, 6) self-evaluate the experience, and 7) evaluate the entire session with the other participants.

The following two simulations can be used together in the classroom to help students 1) develop self-reflection skills, 2) understand and analyze difficulties of communication within culturally diverse communities, and 3) grow in their own competency skills at managing cultural diversity.

SIMULATION # 1: Introduction to Self-Reflection

Ask students to write the following statement with their nondominant hand: "I am writing my name _____ with my nondominant hand."

After the exercise, ask the students the following: "Describe in three words or less your personal feelings and/or thoughts about the experience of writing with your nondominant hand."

As students answer, write their exact words on the board; usual responses include: "frustrated, vulnerable, awkward, embarrassed, fun." Following this discussion, introduce the next simulation.

SIMULATION #2: Cross-Cultural Communication

Divide the class into four equal groups. Give each group a different script from those offered below. The four groups have three minutes to become familiar with their scripts. Each script describes rules for communicating. Then each student is asked to pair up with a member of another group, but to follow his/her own group's script for communicating. Each person must obtain at least two pieces of information about his/her partner from the other group. Conversations are stopped after two minutes and students return to their original seats.

Scripts:

#1: Speak louder than you normally would, use hand gestures often, stand 6 inches

closer to your partner than you normally would, and ask lots of personal questions.

#2: Speak more softly than you normally would, stand much farther away from your partner than you normally would, do not initiate conversation, do not look at your partner in the eyes, and do not ask questions.

#3: Speak gently but in your normal voice, look down or over your partner's shoulder, do not show emotion or react to your partner when he or she is speaking, and avoid eye contact.

#4: Touch your partner when you change the topic of conversation and do that as often as you wish, look directly at your partner, ask questions often, and interrupt your partner fairly frequently.

Debriefing

1. Write four questions on the board before the simulation and explain that these will be used for later discussion. The questions are: What did you see or hear? What is its meaning in relation to ideas of culture we have discussed? What was your personal reaction to the experience? How are you going to use this experience in a practical way?

2. After the cross-cultural conversation simulation, ask students to give you their immediate personal response ("I felt rude," "I couldn't stop giggling," "I felt so frustrated").

3. Ask one person from each group to read his/her script.

4. Ask students to name various nonverbal forms of communication encountered in the simulation (gesture, eye contact, personal space).

5. Ask students to comment on what each learned from participating in the simulation.

Comments following this simulation often include: "I never realized before how much our communication is governed by rules,"

"We are just not conscious of what governs our behavior," "I can almost feel the culture operating inside me that I never saw before," "I never realized how much I could be 'turned off' by the way another person communicates," "It is hard to care about understanding another person's viewpoint when they are communicating in such a 'rude' manner."

At this point, ask students to offer ideas for how learning from this experience can be used in a practical way. Introduce the Fourteen Competencies and hand them out on a piece of paper to go over in detail. Offer the suggestion that practicing these competencies helps people deal more effectively with the frustrations that grow out of cross-cultural communication.

Suggested Readings

Cryer, P. "Designing an Educational Game, Simulation or Workshop: A 'Course and Curriculum' Design Perspective," *Simulation/Games for Learning* 17(2): 51-59, 1987.

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Mikel Hogan Garcia
Human Services and Anthropology
California State University-Fullerton