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GIFT: Great Idea for Teaching Speech

**Immigration Encounter:
Relevance of Emotions in Communication****Chrystal Helmcke**

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Abstract

Students desire meaningful ways to dissect and explore confusing and challenging concepts. Chief among these in our world today are the multifaceted issues and exceptionally complex discourses involved in immigration. The guided visualization in this G.I.F.T. may be used to demonstrate emotions, the five canons of rhetoric, intercultural communication, proofs of persuasion, or theories within the critical or phenomenological traditions. This guided visualization also adapts well to a blended classroom (with students onsite and offsite) since the instructor leads students through the visualization. Through this activity, students will describe the emotions that underpin communication about immigration, interpret how emotions influence meaning, examine personal biases that influence understanding, and formulate a new understanding of the impact of biases regarding cultural communication.

Courses

Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Introduction to Rhetoric, Public Speaking, Communication Theory, Media and Society

Student Learning Outcomes

- Describe the emotions that underpin communication
- Interpret how emotions influence opinions, understanding, and meaning
- Examine personal biases that influence understanding

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- Formulate a new understanding of the impact of biases regarding cultural communication

Instruction and Rationale

Whether trying to understand a complicated communication theory or construct a solid persuasive argument for a speech, students desire meaningful ways to dissect and explore confusing concepts. Activities that incorporate personal application enable students to make sense out of uncertainty (Geerinck, Masschelein, & Simons, 2010). Students also crave relevance and often participate in activities in the classroom to obtain skills/knowledge required to solve problems in their own lives (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Fortunately for teachers, students are powerfully impacted when learning includes an experiential component (Gilley, 2003). One type of experiential classroom activity is a simulation. A simulation is a method of teaching that allows learners to gain competencies through experiences that mimic the outside world (Gilley, 2003). To create a simulation, faculty can design learning activities using scenarios that mimic how an event may unfold in the wider world. Students then experience the simulation, and the faculty member can then use reflection and discussion to help students assess the significance of the activity.

The activity, Immigration Encounter, was designed to examine how emotions impact our communicative lives. The guided visualization with accompanying questions easily fits into courses such as intercultural communication (to focus on intercultural narratives), introduction to rhetoric (to emphasize invention and delivery of the five canons), public speaking (to highlight emotions [pathos] in crafting a message), and communication theory (to explore emotions and meaning for Symbolic Interactionism). This activity may enhance a course component where the emphasis is on emotions, the five canons of rhetoric, intercultural communication, proofs of persuasion, or theories within the critical or phenomenological traditions. This guided visualization adapts to a blended classroom (with students onsite and offsite) since the instructor leads students through the visualization. The guided visualization script may be recorded for students in an online class. Students in an online class would experience the guided visualization on their own by listening to the recording, but then reflect on the discussion questions in an online discussion forum moderated by the instructor.

The basis for this teaching tool is to help students understand their emotions better. Understanding how emotions impact our communication is an invaluable skill. Knowledge of emotions helps students further develop emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence allows an individual to better understand emotions (own/others' emotions) in order to manage and communicate these emotions effectively (McCornack, 2016). One can use his or her understanding of emotional intelligence as a force for good, not just in academic and political settings, but also in advocacy organizations, nonprofits, places of worship, corporations, personal relationships, and a great number of other contexts.

This activity helps students improve their emotional intelligence by experiencing a plethora of emotions in a safe environment. Students describe the emotions experienced, and the class as a whole explores how emotions may influence opinions, meaning, and understanding. Through the discussion questions, students examine biases that may influence understanding. A full, singular class period (minimum 50 minutes) should be used for this activity to ensure that

each student participates in the class discussion. The praxis of the simulation and the discussion allows students to formulate a new understanding of how biases influence communication. Students leave with greater confidence to discern and understand how emotions impact communication in different settings.

Description of the Activity

This simulation may take place in almost any classroom space and configuration. It is ideal if students are able to sit in spaces other than their usual desks/tables. Such departure from the typical seating arrangement may encourage students to move further outside of their habitual approach to course activities. The instructor directs students to find a comfortable place to sit for the 15-minute simulation. Students use their imagination to transport themselves away from the classroom to another location. The students should close their eyes to visualize as the instructor reads from the simulation script. While reading the script (see Appendix A for full script), the instructor speaks at a moderate pace with a relaxed tone. Additionally, the instructor should frequently pause to allow participants to fully envision the scenario as it progresses.

The instruction for the activity begins with some directives that help the students stay on task for the duration of the guided visualization: Now that you are comfortable, please close your eyes. Throughout this activity I will ask you to keep your eyes closed and focus on the guidance of my voice... If, occasionally, you inadvertently open your eyes, do not be distressed, simply silently acknowledge to yourself that you've stepped away from the activity, close your eyes again and refocus on my voice. The instructor reads from the script to start the visualization with this scenario: Imagine you are on the downtown streets of a familiar city... You can picture buildings and landmarks in detail. You can imagine the sights, the sounds, the smells, and even the feel of the city on your skin... And while you are conscious of the typical hustle and bustle of the city, all feels peaceful and right with this environment.

The experience in the city continues, and through the script, the instructor brings students to an immigration rally: In a moment you become aware of the obvious sound of a crowd gathered in a particular place... You cannot quite make out all the words, but somehow think you hear words related to immigration or maybe deportation? Your steps quicken because your curiosity has been kindled... The script gently guides participants to examine the emotions on display as they experience the rally unfolding before their mind's eye: The palpable intensity of emotions on the display at the event is undeniable. Each seeming "side" of the rally appears equally represented with powerful voices, multiplicity of people and proclamation of position. Some of those gathered obviously are advocating for revised and more effective immigration policies. Others who are gathered clearly are defending the rights of all immigrants and refugees – legal or not."

Students are then allowed to explore their feelings: "As you listen and observe, you discover you have a strong resonance with one viewpoint in particular. For reasons you may not completely comprehend, your mind and heart align more readily with one of the perspectives being expressed. You do not judge yourself for this viewpoint, but instead introspectively acknowledge the reality of it. You ponder possible origins of this viewpoint in your life and reasons it remains valid for you today. Are there people in your life who have influenced this

understanding? Are there situations that have contributed meaning? You consider whether or not you feel strongly enough about your view to join the rally and add your voice to the chants. The instructor pauses to allow students time to recognize and begin to understand their personal emotions.

As the simulation nears the end, the script encourages students to consider emotions different than their own. At this moment, you spot a friend across the crowd. You are amazed to see this person and raise your hand in greeting. Simultaneously, someone right beside you raises his or her hand, and for just a moment you confuse that hand with your own – and you are startled. The skin color of that other hand is completely different from your own and for a hot second you shockingly wonder if your ethnicity is actually something different from what you've always known. The odd experience immediately tests your sense of identity and position. What is happening? Are you truly who you think you are? If your skin is a color other than what you previously thought, are your perspectives of the immigration rally altered? Do you wonder if other people see you differently, too? In a flash, the other person moves away, and you realize the experience was merely an illusion – but it gives you pause.

This final portion of the simulation allows students to confront and examine their sense of identity and position. It is important to allow approximately 60 seconds for students to reflect after you read the following statements: Ponder for a moment the possibility of being a skin color different from your own. Consider the way a different skin color might lead you to feel more or less connected to certain viewpoints on the issue of immigration.

Debriefing

At the conclusion of the simulation, the instructor facilitates reflective discussion guided by specific prompts. In order to foster an atmosphere of transparency, trust, and vulnerability, it is suggested that the first 2-3 questions be discussed in a small group or pair-and-share arrangement, with the instructor actively circulating among groups and mindfully helping pace the discussion. At the instructor's discretion, the final 2-3 questions should be discussed with the large group. The following questions are the suggested discussion prompts:

1. After experiencing the simulation, would you attend an immigration rally/event? Why or why not?
2. How did today's exercise change how you feel about immigration, immigrants, or your awareness of immigration as a local and national issue? If your opinion hasn't changed, please share why.
3. Does the sensation of sympathy and empathy, if you or someone you know is an immigrant, have the potential to change conversations about immigration?
4. Why is it important to practice feeling emotions through our bodies when it comes to complex topics like immigration?
5. How do we help others based on what we felt and experienced today?

Appraisal

Based on the timeliness of the immigration issue, the discussion should prompt many powerful reflections from students. The students should be able to connect the course content and personal emotions to more global issues like immigration. To further gauge the level of critical thinking, the class could end with students writing a one-sentence summary about their experience. Through this activity, students are given an opportunity to identify the emotions that underpin communication, interpret how emotions influence opinions/understanding/meaning, examine personal biases that influence understanding, and formulate a new understanding of the impact of biases regarding cultural communication. Reviewing the one-sentence writing reflections gives instructors another means by which to assess the students' engagement with and learning from the simulation activity.

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Appendix: Instructor Script for Immigration Imagination: Walking in Your Shoes

Ideally, this activity will take place in a classroom space that allows students to sit in spaces other than their usual desks/tables. Throughout the script, the instructor should speak with a clear tone and at a moderate pace. The instructor should bear in mind that participants frequently need brief pauses to fully envision the scenario as it progresses.

Before we begin, please find a comfortable place to sit, then turn off and put away your phone. Now that you are comfortable, please close your eyes. Throughout this activity I will ask you to keep your eyes closed and focus on the guidance of my voice. You will use your imagination to transport yourself away from this classroom and to another location. If, occasionally, you inadvertently open your eyes, do not be distressed, simply silently acknowledge to yourself that you've stepped away from the activity, close your eyes again and refocus on my voice. *Acknowledging up front students' tendencies to "cheat" helps reduce both their temptation to do so and their anxiety that it might happen at all.*

Let's begin. Please take three deep breaths, slowly, and with each exhale release any tension in your neck, shoulders and back. Place your hands comfortably in your lap or at your side. *Instructors may choose to side-coach the three breaths out loud, or simply leave time and space for all students to fully take the three breaths.*

Imagine you are on the downtown streets of a familiar city. This is a city in which you have spent significant amounts of time during the day and also at night. It does not have to be a vast metropolitan area, but it is bigger than a town. It is a city. It is a city in which you can picture some of the buildings and landmarks in detail. You can imagine the sights, the sounds, the smells and even the feel of the city on your skin.

It is mid-afternoon of the springtime. The climate is dry and comfortable – the temperature is neither too warm nor too cool. You are walking along a familiar street without a particular destination or agenda in mind. Perhaps you have in hand a favorite beverage or snack purchased in the city. And while you are conscious of the typical hustle and bustle of the city, all feels peaceful and right with this environment.

In a moment you become aware of the obvious sound of a crowd gathered in a particular place. You cannot see the crowd, but you can hear the distinct sound of collective voices. In fact, as you continue walking toward the sound, curious of its origins, you become aware that the crowd is chanting something. The chant is not especially strident or violent in tone, but assertive and clear. You cannot quite make out all the words, but somehow think you hear words related to immigration or maybe deportation?

Your steps quicken because your curiosity has been kindled and you want to find this crowd. You feel no fear – after all you are very comfortable in this city – but you do feel a bit of excitement wondering if you have stumbled upon an interesting event. You approach a corner and the crowd noise increases and intensifies. You round the corner and suddenly see a large gathering of people around a familiar landmark in this city (perhaps a park, a sculpture or a specific building). The crowd is filled with a wide variety of people – women, men & children of all skin colors - many of whom are carrying signs. As you study the scene before you, you notice that some signs are clearly in support of a conservative political view and others are clearly in support of a more progressive political view. In addition, you can now clearly hear some of the chants competing against each other. From one corner of the crowd you hear “Build the wall! Build the wall!” and “U-S-A! U-S-A!” and from another direction shouts of “Education, not deportation!” and “Say it loud! Say it clear! Refugees are welcome here!”

The palpable intensity of emotions on the display at the event is undeniable. Each seeming “side” of the rally appears equally represented with powerful voices, multiplicity of people and proclamation of position. Some of those gathered obviously are advocating for revised and more effective immigration policies. Others who are gathered clearly are defending the rights of all immigrants and refugees – legal or not.

As you listen and observe, you discover you have a strong resonance with one viewpoint in particular. For reasons you may not completely comprehend, your mind and heart align more readily with one of the perspectives being expressed. You do not judge yourself for this viewpoint, but instead introspectively acknowledge the reality of it. You ponder possible origins of this viewpoint in your life and reasons it remains valid for you today. Are there people in your life who have influenced this understanding? Are there situations that have contributed meaning?

You consider whether or not you feel strongly enough about your view to join the rally and add your voice to the chants.

At this moment, you spot a friend across the crowd. You are amazed to see this person and raise your hand in greeting. Simultaneously, someone right beside you raises his or her hand, and for just a moment you confuse that hand with your own – and you are startled. The skin color of that other hand is completely different from your own and for a hot second you shockingly wonder if your ethnicity is actually something different from what you've always known.

The odd experience immediately tests your sense of identity and position. What is happening? Are you truly who you think you are? If your skin is a color other than what you previously thought, are your perspectives of the immigration rally altered? Do you wonder if other people see you differently, too? In a flash, the other person moves away and you realize the experience was merely an illusion – but it gives you pause. Ponder for a moment the possibility of being a skin color different from your own. Consider the way a different skin color might lead you to feel more or less connected to certain viewpoints on the issue of immigration. *Pause a full 45-60 seconds for student reflection.*

In a moment I will ask you to open your eyes and return to the classroom. In preparation, please take three deep breaths and each time you exhale, release more and more of the imagery of the immigration rally in the city. Now, open your eyes.