WORKSHOP
Using Simulations to Develop
Pre-Service Teachers’ Multicultural Competence

3:00-4:15
LOCATION: Room 207-208

Facilitator:
John Suarez (SUNY Cortland)

Abstract:
Participants explore the potential of developing future teachers’ multicultural competence through simulations (role-play) based on those individuals’ current service-learning experiences. (Although designed for education faculty and administrators, this approach is useful for practitioners in other fields that have increasingly diverse populations.) By combining role-play with academic content and reflection, participants practice behaviors that help reinforce intercultural competence, interpersonal skills, and emotional well-being.

Learning Outcomes:
1. Generate methods of integrating students’ experiences into shared classroom activities
2. Identify ways of intentionally integrating emotion into learning strategies

Performance criteria:
1. The number and quality of methods generated in which students’ experiences are converted into classroom activities
2. The number of ways named in which emotion can be integrated into learning strategies

Facilitation Plan:
1. Facilitator justifies the approach to be explored in the workshop.
2. Participants role-play educational situations generated from students’ experiences, and they reflect – as students – on their role-play experience.
3. Participants discuss the applicability, benefits, and drawbacks of this approach.

Resources
Summary of justification for this approach
Background
Examples of cross-cultural material generated for and by students
Role-play descriptions
Using Simulations to Develop Pre-Service Teachers’ Multicultural Competence

Summary of justification for this approach: Recent research in Neuroscience and in Educational Psychology suggests that
1. Emotions are integral to thinking, learning, and motivation. Service-Learning students’ responses to their field experiences often reflect strong emotions that seem to be sparked by a sense of personal connections with community members, and/or by a mismatch between pre-existing beliefs and new experiences. Based on these findings, we claim that service-learning’s effectiveness is due in large part to students’ emotional responses to their course-based field experiences.
2. Role-playing’s effectiveness comes from the human brain’s tendency to integrate emotion and cognition, and it accepts imagined activity as real. As a result, role-playing can be an experiential learning tool that helps students understand course content and empathize with their community partners.

Background: Material for this workshop was drawn from two service-learning freshmen English Composition classes in the 2011-2012 academic year at SUNY Cortland: Writing Studies in the Community I and II. Students in the fall semester were part of a learning community that included Introduction to Sociology; students volunteered with a variety of community agencies.

Students in the spring semester were in a learning community that involved Introduction to Urban Education. All of these students were Inclusive Special Education majors; they volunteered at an elementary school in Syracuse, NY.

In both of these classes, we defined the term “multiculturalism” broadly, to include poverty.

Students prepare for role-plays in a variety of ways, including
1. Course readings that address cultural issues
2. Service-learning experiences
3. Attendance at relevant presentations
4. Their own electronic database research for assignments in which they integrate their service-learning experiences with their research
5. Reflective Peer Review sessions, in which students apply reflective listening skills to editing sessions for major writing assignments. In one form of these sessions, students use a computer to project their second draft of a major assignment onto a screen.
6. Service-Learning “debriefs,” in which students discuss their service-learning experiences and their reflections on those experiences

Provided below are samples of some of that preparation
Samples from Service-Learning Logs
- I am working in an ESL class and I have students from all around the world – Kenya and Iran.
- [Today, my host] teacher told the students that we need to use the crayons and material carefully b/c we don’t have enough money for new ones next year. [Seven weeks later...] A couple of small fights broke out between the students due to lack of materials like crayons.
- I got to work with Ishmel, who was having behavioral problems. Once I got to talk with him individually, I found out his mom is having a baby and thought maybe this is why he was starving for so much attention.
- One girl can barely speak English – looks like she has a hard time. How is she in 5th grade?
- When talking to the children, I learned that many of them come from homes [in which] they only live with a mom or dad or even sometimes a grandparent.
- My teacher asked the students who celebrated Easter and only about half of them, if that many, raised their hands.
- Today we found out that the students in the after school program were in trouble for making the room a mess. They were not allowed to go to their special event, instead they had to clean the room and the desks. [The teacher] told the students that if they did not want to be in the program that they did not have to, and to tell their parents to get them out of the program. I felt that this was not the right thing to say because it might not be the student’s choice or the parents’ choice to have them in this program. The parents might work late to try to support the family and they need to put their child in the school to keep them in a safe environment.
- Today was our last day in our service-learning class. After developing relationships [a theme in our writing class], it was difficult to say goodbye. I learned a lot, especially how to use “assumption of sameness” in the classroom. [“Assumption of Sameness” was explained by a panelist in our Multicultural Miscommunication Panel Discussion.]

Samples from students’ reactions to a presentation by a former child migrant worker
Before this seminar I really did not even know what a migrant student was. Growing up on Long Island I never came across a migrant student in my school. ...So, before the seminar started I really didn’t have a very good idea of what it meant to be a migrant student. The speaker did a great job at showing the point of view from a migrant student, touching on her personal experiences as a migrant student, but also as a teacher and how teachers can so easily make it hard for a migrant student. I felt that one of the biggest points that the speaker brought up was that it is important for the teacher to not act as if the student is temporary. Even though we may know as teachers that the student may not be there for that long, we as professionals need to do our jobs and educate the student in front of us.

I found the presentation about migrant children to be very interesting and informative. I did not expect Sherri to be a migrant child. I have to say that I am guilty of assuming that most migrant children are of Hispanic backgrounds. ...It definitely shocked me when Sherri was talking about not having her name on a desk. Something as simple as having a name on a desk gives authority to a student and a sense of ownership. Otherwise, that student will only feel temporary, as Sherri states the way she felt. These migrant children have been temporary enough times. What if we were those teachers who made these migrant children feel permanent and were the first to do so? That would have the biggest impact on these children’s lives. EB, spring 2012

Samples from research
In Mexico, little research is done on disabilities. Most of the research completed about Mexicans with disabilities is done in the United States, after those individuals have immigrated (Bauman, 2009, p. 17). This
may stem from the superstitious belief that disabled individuals are caused by a hex or a curse (Bauman 2009). Many Mexican families consider disabilities to be the result of jealousy and the evil eye. It is important to understand this because there may be resistance from parents to accept whether or not their child has a disability. …In regards to an interdependent family, many Mexican families have the expectation that children will grow up and aid in supporting the family. Therefore, it may be frightening to parents to accept that their child is disabled.

Families may have a difficult time accepting their children with disabilities, but the Mexican public also places some obstacles. Bauman (2009) depicts situation of young children with disabilities. While describing each child’s situation, Bauman states, "Sophie's mother has more problems with other people accepting her child. She is asked if she has sinned and that has caused the problem of her child. Jose's mother stated this is not a culture that accepts people with disabilities. The culture has visions of beautiful people, not people with disabilities." (Bauman, 2009, p. 17). The viewpoint of the Mexican public could be detrimental towards special education.

Adera (2011) mentions, in Ghana’s culture, disabilities are viewed with prejudice and negative attitudes. Local folklore and songs are used because of long-held belief that the disabilities are a curse from ancestors. Persons with disabilities are called a menagerie of offensive names, such as “social misfits,” “outcasts,” or “feeble-minded.” Unfortunately, it is not just the child that faces ridicule in this culture; the parents also face isolation and mockery (p. 29).

I found out from the teacher with whom I worked, Mrs. R---, about the familial backgrounds of the students in the Speech & Language class during the first five weeks of my service-learning experience. I learned that one of the 5th grade boys, Curtis—a boy who cannot sit still for very much time (due to his Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), who disrupts class constantly and purposely, and who usually distracts his peers from their work —has what could be viewed as a very complicated family background and home life.

Curtis lives with his father, aunt, and grandmother. His mother isn’t in the picture; she’s wrapped up in drugs and has been in and out of prison; Curtis was born addicted to cocaine. He has a sister who is in her late 20s years of age and who has several children of her own. When Curtis is on his medication for his ADD, his personality subsides dramatically, sometimes to the point where he will be so focused in class that he will not talk at all, and the good aspects of his socialization completely diminish. When Curtis does not take his medication, he is too talkative in class, but there are good aspects to his socialization skills. When Curtis was put into the Speech & Language class at [the school], his father was insulted; he became irritated and angry with the school for putting his child into a “special ed.” class. Curtis’ father felt as though the school was labeling his son as “stupid.”

With this in mind, Wehbi (2006) notes that the “poverty experienced by people with disabilities is tied to lack of access and opportunities to education and employment; indeed, low levels of education have been consistently linked to poverty (UNDP, 2003). For example, low levels of education deny people the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills necessary to integrate in the formal labour market, where pay, benefits and working conditions are typically more advantageous than the informal economic sector” (p. 332).

A preschool-aged student told me how his dad’s car was stolen the night before, another spoke about how her mother left her home alone all night – she is four years old. Most of the students’ parents do not work, thus they receive checks from the government, and these are the people whom the students are looking to for answers on where to go in life. Without access to a quality education, these students have nothing.
Statistically, a lot of these urban students will unfortunately end-up dropping out of school before they graduate, and will probably end-up involved in some type of criminal behavior. There have been many comparisons between urban dropouts and prison inmates. In 2005, the amount of funding given to each student in urban New York City was $11,700, while in suburban Manhasset, Long Island the per-pupil spending was nearly double; $22,000 (Kozol, 2005). It is no coincidence that 66% of the state’s prison population comes from New York City, while only 5% of prisoners come from Long Island (Wagner, 2002), as seen in the chart below…

Sample simulation/role-play scenes. Note: for each of these scenes, some participants could serve as “observers.”

Simulation/Role-play Scene: Soup Kitchen, based on experiences of students in fall 2011.

Server #1 – You are a SUNY Cortland co-ed volunteer.
- Two guests will ask for seconds. Even though giving a second helping is against the rules, do give one person a second helping, but do not give the other person additional food.
- After the elderly gentleman takes his seat, join him at his table so that you and he can continue your conversation. After you and he chat for a minute or so, he will ask you about your background; tell him that your family is from the Dominican Republic.

Server #2 – You are doing community service as punishment for violating parole.
- If asked, feel free to tell the other servers about your misdemeanor (for which you were put on parole). Examples include writing graffiti, issuing a bad check, and reckless endangerment of property. When the sixth-grade boy gets on line, feel free to ask him questions such as
  - How come you’re not in school?
  - Where are your parents?
- A man with three children; he is not their father.
- Man – You know these children; be sure that they behave while you and they are on line for food and while they are eating.
- Children – You are hungry and in a new location; act accordingly. (You could be cranky and/or tired.)
A pregnant woman with three children
• Woman
  o You are pregnant by a man who is not these children’s father.
  o Although you want to eat, you’d rather smoke a cigarette; feel free to ask a server and/or
    another guest for a cigarette.
  o Ask a server for a second helping of food
• Children – You are hungry and in a new location; act accordingly. (You could be cranky and/or
tired.)

Solitary person #1.
• Walk to the food counter while talking to yourself (about anything not related to college).
• If the server talks to you, you can use words and/or body language to answer.
• Once you have your food, take a seat and keep mumbling to yourself; as you do so, you’re your
tone of voice gets angrier.

Solitary person #3: sixth-grade boy who should be in school.
• Do not make eye-contact with the servers.
• Do answer servers’ questions, if you’d like, and as you’d like.
• Take a seat and eat your meal. After you’ve finished, go to a server and ask for seconds.

Solitary person #4: an elderly man
• While on line to get food, chat with one of the female servers.
• Take a seat.
• The server (with whom you were talking) will sit with you to continue your chat.
• After a minute or two of discussion, ask her about her background. She’ll say that, “My family is
  from the Dominican Republic.” You reply, “Oh, you’re a nigger.”

Post-simulation discussion can build on prompts such as:
• How would you have reacted differently to some people’s comments or behaviors? Why?
• Why might some of these individuals be guests of the soup kitchen?
• Would you call these individuals “guests”? Why? If not, what word would you use? Explain.
The next three scenes are based on experiences described by people in a March 2012 *Cross-Cultural (mis)Communication* Panel Discussion and by students volunteering in the community.

**Simulation/Role-play Scene: Tutoring Session**
- **Roles**
  - Tutor
  - Tutee
- **Situation** – During the tutoring session,
  - The teacher repeatedly asks the child to look at her/him, but
  - The child does not do so
- **Explanation provided on one of the parent-team’s card** – In some cultures, looking at an elder or a person in a position of power is regarded as a sign of disrespect.

**Simulation/Role-play Scene: Parent-Teacher Association meeting**
- **Roles**
  - Parent-Teacher Association Chair
  - Four Teachers
  - Four parents
- **Situation** – During the PTA meeting,
  - The lead teacher asks for one volunteer for each of four projects
  - Although two of the students volunteer, one of the students does not
- **Possible explanation** – In some cultures, people show respect by specifically asking an individual for help (rather than by asking for someone to offer to help).

**Simulation/Role-play Scene: Classroom meeting**
- **Roles**
  - Principal
  - Teacher
  - Special Education expert
  - Father
  - Mother
- **Situation** – During a meeting with a child’s father and mother,
  - The school officials explain to the parents that they (the officials) have secured help from a special education specialist for the parents’ child
  - The parents demand that their child not meet with the specialist, even though there’s no charge to the parents.
- **Possible explanation** – In some cultures, a child’s disability is a sign that spiritual forces are at work, and that mortals have no business interfering.

Post-simulation discussion can build on prompts such as:
- In what ways did a lack of cultural sensitivity interfere with student/teacher relationships?
- How could that insensitivity interfere with learning?
- What considerations *other than* cultural insensitivity could have contributed to this situation?