

Diversity Discussions: A Nonverbal Study

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Objective

To examine the role and increase student awareness of basic issues related to nonverbal communication across cultures.

Approximate Time Required

20 minutes of class instruction while introducing assignment and entertaining questions.

Approximately 60 minutes for student face to face meeting conducted outside of class.

Student presentation time will vary according to how many students are in the class and the speaking time assigned by the professor.

Materials Needed

Student: Paper and pen or other note-taking device. Note cards for presenting speech.

Professor: Assessment tool for speeches and copies of assignment handouts.

Rationale

I think it is important to give my students an (applied) out-of-the-classroom opportunity to test the theories and concepts learned and to critically reflect about their own learning. This application affords students exposure to similarities and differences as they relate to inter-cultural communication while applying (nonverbal, interpersonal, and public speaking) theories/ideas and skills learned throughout the semester.

What To Do Before The Activity

Cover in class (or provide handouts) the vocabulary contained in the assignment itself. Create and photocopy assessment tool for presentations.

Introducing this activity: Read assignment being sure that students understand all four elements (expectations, notes and reflections, presentation and final project reflection), entertain

questions, and schedule due dates for all four elements of this assignment. Schedule suggestion: expectations two classes before presentations start, notes and reflections due one class before speeches start, final reflection due class which follows last speaking day.

What To Do During The Activity

Encourage or require students to take notes during peer presentations. The notes will come in handy for answering the final reflection questions.

What To Do After The Activity

Allow for class discussion and assign final reflection questions that allow students to critically analyze what they have learned as a result of the assignment. Sample questions:

What are the strengths of this assignment?

What are the weaknesses of this assignment?

What are the limitations of an assignment such as this?

What might one have learned about themselves as a result of this experience?

What might your diversity partner have gained from the experience?

How can this assignment be changed to make it better?

What conclusions can we draw as a result of our overall experiences with this assignment?

What surprised you most about this class assignment?

Draft a thank you letter to send to each diversity partner (copy and paste names). Often students like hand delivering the letters, which cuts down on faculty time and postage.

Alternative Uses Or Extensions

For writing intensified course, require paper or require speech as public speaking element of course. This activity could be adapted for use in an interpersonal or nonverbal communication class.

Find a need within the community and develop further as a service-learning assignment.

Pair students up and make one student responsible for the evaluation of the nonverbal behavior between the other student and the diversity partner (during the interview).

References

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- Smith M. F (Ed). (2001). NCA 2001 Summer Conference "*Engaging 21st Century Communication Students*" proceedings from the service-learning strand. National Communication Association. Available at: <http://www.natcom.org/Instruction/summerconf/sl.htm>

Multi-cultural Assignment – Diversity Pairings

Task: Get to know the nonverbal practice(s) of someone you do not already know very well who is from another country. While it is true that communication between people from different domestic cultures is inter-cultural communication, this assignment requires you to speak to a person from another country. You will be responsible for providing yourself with a Diversity Partner. Take a good look around you. Such a person may be in one of your classes, at work, at your place of worship, or a friend of a family member. You must identify and meet with your Diversity Partner once. If you are unable to locate a willing Diversity Partner on your own, try the International Students Club or the ESL office on campus.

Goals:

Recognize similarities and differences in nonverbal communication across cultures.

Understand some of the factors that contribute to misunderstandings when people from different cultures communicate.

Reduce uncertainty when communicating inter-culturally.

Motivate students to communicate with people from other cultures/ethnic groups.

Increase sensitivity to other cultures/ethnic groups.

Identify skills necessary to communicate more effectively.

Assignment: One face to face Diversity Discussion with your Diversity Partner must occur. While not required, this objective can often be accomplished by having an extended lunch with your Diversity Partner. Some pairs meet more frequently. It is up to you and your Diversity Partner to decide when and where to meet.

Before the meeting, you will submit your typed expectations. Shortly after you conclude the Diversity Discussion, you must record the results of the assignment and your thoughts (answer reflection questions) as you reflect on the discussion. You will submit your typed notes and reflections after the meeting.

Presentation: You will present the results of this assignment verbally. In doing so, you must report the results of your Diversity Discussions along with the thoughts you recorded. Your speech must be _____ minutes long.

Your presentation must follow the introduction, body, and conclusion guidelines provided. You will have six main points in your body. Your main points will be the items underlines in the guidelines below. In _____ minutes you will not be able to cover all that you learned. Pick those items you think your audience would be most interested in learning.

You may use note cards, but you may not read your presentation to the audience.

Grade Breakdown:

Expectations (typed)	_____ points due: _____
Notes and reflections (typed)	_____ points due: _____
Presentation	_____ points due: see calendar (speech)
Final project reflection	_____ points due: _____
Total	_____ points (____% of final grade)

Expectation Questions (you cannot submit answers to these questions until after you have obtained an interview partner):

- What is the name of your partner?
- How did you come by this person?
- What do you think is going to happen when you meet with your partner?
- What fears do you have related to the interview?
- What will you do to prepare for the interview?
- What will you do, during the interview, to ensure the interview is a success?
- How do you think you are going to feel during the interview?

Meeting Guidelines:

Do not attempt this meeting without ensuring you completely understand all of the questions you are going to ask. Unpreparedness will not reflect favorable.

Guidelines for meeting:

Explain to your Diversity Partner that you are interested in knowing about their experiences and that you do not expect them to represent their entire culture.

Make the assignment and its goals clear to your Diversity Partner.

Discuss the expectations of both parties regarding this pairing.

Ask the following questions (be sure to record the answers you get):

Gesture and Movement

What is the gesture for?:

“Goodbye”

“Good job”

“Well done”

Agreement

Disagreement

“I’m hungry”

“What time is it?”

“I’m thirsty”

“Come here”

“Go away”

“I am really ‘ticked off’ at you”

“I don’t know”

Touch

What are some examples of touch that signals friendship-warmth?

How do intimate lovers and spouses touch each other?

Who engages more in general touch or body contact, North Americans or those from your partner's country of origin?

In what way(s) do female friends touch each other?

In what way(s) do male friends touch each other?

Facial Behavior

Who smiles more often, men or women? Why?

If a person frowns, what does it mean?

Do men and women look people in the eye in public? Why/why not?

What does eye contact communicate?

If one makes eye contact with another, what are they supposed to do next?

What does one do with their eyes in a small public space like an elevator or subway?

When talking and listening, where does one focus their gaze?

Who tends to look longer at their conversational partners, men or women?

Vocal Behavior

How is silence used?

What perceptions exist about the accent of a person?

What does it mean when a person is talking loud?

What are the vocal cues associated with anger?

Space and Territoriality

Who gets to "hang out" in their 0-18" zone?

What about the 18" to 4' zone?

What about the 4' to 8' zone?

Who interacts with others at a closer distance overall, men or women?

Is the town, village, countryside, city, etc. high in density?

If so, does it cause people to feel crowded?

Physical Appearance

Are there any cultural rules for the hairstyles of men and women?

Where does body piercing weigh in for both genders?

What is considered physically attractive in the opposite sex (of your partner)?

Using Sheldon's system, which of the three types are more prevalent in their culture of origin?

What are the nonverbal messages associated with height, weight, and skin color?

What are the clothing rules of for men and women?

Multi-cultural Assignment – Diversity Pairings (continued)

Reflection (to be answered by you after the meeting):

If you had to do it again, and you had to make changes, what would you do differently during your meeting?

What similarities do you and your Diversity Partner share?

What were the biggest differences between you and your Diversity Partner?

Was the meeting a success? Why/Why not?

What did you learn?

What information obtained surprised you most during this interaction?

Overall, what did you learn?

What did you learn about yourself as a result of the interview?

How did you feel during the interaction?

What nonverbal behaviors did you observe your partner practicing during the interaction?

How did your experiences relating to this assignment meet with your expectations?

Multi-cultural Assignment – Diversity Pairings Self-Reflection Survey

Name _____

Now that you have completed all of the elements of the multi-cultural project, it is time to do your final reflection. In doing so, you must complete both side of this paper. **Your answers to the questions on the reverse must be in paragraph form.**

Scale: 1 = LOW/strongly disagree 2 3 4 = HIGH/strongly agree

I learned a lot from this project.

1 2 3 4

This project was challenging.

1 2 3 4

The project was relevant to the course.

1 2 3 4

I learned a lot about myself from this project.

1 2 3 4

I benefitted from the reflective dimension of this project.

1 2 3 4

I was satisfied with the level of work I put forth in this project.

1 2 3 4

Links were made between class theory and “real life.”

1 2 3 4

Some educators say that real learning means being able to integrate learning into your own behavior. With that definition, I feel that the multi-cultural project was very successful in helping me really learn.

1 2 3 4

Multi-cultural Assignment – Diversity Pairings Self-Reflection Survey

After hearing your classmates present their work, discuss three things you have learned about nonverbal communication?

What did you like about this particular project?

What changes do you suggest for the next class?