

異文化間シミュレーションにおける経験的学習 Experiential Learning with Intercultural Simulations

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Abstract: University education is now expected to develop graduates who can be active in a global environment. Teaching intercultural knowledge and skills is known to be enhanced by experiential learning such as simulations. Two intercultural simulations were conducted in the classroom and analyzed through participants' (22) responses to questionnaires. "The Albatross" simulation led participants to experience cross-cultural stress and learn how cultural misunderstandings occur. "Rocket" simulation provided an opportunity to learn about multicultural working environments, particularly communication skill and decision making. Because "Rocket" is a cultural specific simulation, it seemed to give participants an objective view of Japanese culture, seeing its strengths and weaknesses in a global work environment.

概要：大学は世界で活躍できる人材を育てることを期待されている。シミュレーションは経験的な学習であり、異文化の知識とスキル（行動）を有効に教える方法だ。本稿は授業中に行われた二つの異文化間シミュレーションと参加者の質問分析を扱うものである。それによるとシミュレーション「アルバトロス」の参加者は異文化ストレスが体験でき、文化的誤解の原因について学ぶことができた。シミュレーション「ロケット」の参加者は多文化の仕事に必要なコミュニケーション・スキルと意思決断について学ぶことができた。「ロケット」は特定文化のシミュレーションだからこそ、参加者は日本文化を客観的に見るができるようになり、日本文化の強い点と弱い点を学ぶことができたと考えられる。

Keywords: intercultural simulation, experiential learning

キーワード：異文化間シミュレーション、経験的学習

1. Introduction

Leaders of Japanese society are looking to universities to develop graduates who can be active in a global environment. A government study on developing "global human resources" described the need for young people who have (1) foreign language linguistic and communication skills, (2) self-direction, a spirit of challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, a sense of responsibility and mission, and (3) understanding of other cultures with a sense of Japanese identity (The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development, 2011). Business people have advised educators to include intercultural communication training to improve graduates' ability to relate to a wide variety of people (Yoshida, Yashiro & Suzuki, 2013). Experience abroad is known to develop students with a more

global outlook as is classroom education on intercultural understanding using interactive approaches. This study reports on the effect of two intercultural simulations, "The Albatross" (Gochenour, 1993) and "Rocket" (Hirshorn, 2010) in a college class.

2. Intercultural Simulations

Learning intercultural skills is a multilayered process involving cognitive learning, discovering one's responses to cultural differences, and trying new verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Intercultural simulations are an educational method used in intercultural training and educational settings to teach attitudes and skills needed to successfully navigate unknown cultural experiences. Like other simulations, intercultural simulations imitate real situations and require participants to take on a role in a large role play.

Intercultural simulations provide opportunities for participants to experience elements of unknown cultures (national, racial, occupational, etc.) and practice new behaviors or skills in a controlled environment. Not only are skills developed but also attitudes change, empathy is built and new perspectives are discovered (McCaffery, 1995, Sisk, 1995). Many intercultural simulations are a game-like activity with cultural barriers as obstacles to completion of a task (Fowler & Pusch, 2010). Intercultural simulations can be culture-general in which an artificial culture group is described or culture-specific in which participants take on the culture of an existing country or culture group.

One of the most widely used intercultural simulations is “BaFa BaFa” (Shirts, 1974) in which participants are divided into two artificial cultural groups and are taught the communication style and values of their group. Participants visit the other culture and experience dealing with unknown cultural rules and one’s response to difference. Other intercultural simulations such as “Barnga” (Steinwachs, 1995), “Ecotonos” (Saphiere, 1995) and “The Albatross” have been widely used in western countries and Japan. “Rocket” is a relatively new intercultural teamwork simulation recently introduced into Japan.

The efficacy of simulations is difficult to measure due to different criterion in different situations. In addition, simulation research lacks control groups for comparison as withholding intercultural learning from people preparing to go abroad would be unethical. Simulations are often just one element of a curriculum which makes isolation of the effect of a simulation difficult (Fowler & Pusch). In the Japanese context, Moriyama has used qualitative analysis of questionnaires to investigate the effects of “The Albatross” and “Barnga” on university students (2010, 2011).

Moriyama’s research with Japanese university students shows a multitude of effects from the simulation experiences. “The Albatross” simulation introduces participants to an artificial cultural group called Albatross people. Participants take part in a welcome ceremony of greetings and

sharing food that is led by the facilitator. Moriyama’s study data from 43 participants revealed that they experienced emotional reactions to the unknown culture, tried to draw meaning from observations, and tried to imitate new behaviors. A debrief explanation of Albatross values and behaviors following the simulation caused students to realize how their misinterpretations of Albatross behavior were due to influence from their own culture.

Moriyama investigated “Barnga” simulation in a similar manner with 42 Japanese university students and a questionnaire following debrief. “Barnga” simulation is a card game played in silence without verbal or written communication. Participants sit in small groups, receive a rule sheet for the game and begin playing. Then a tournament begins and players from different tables mix, resulting in confusion due to people playing in different ways. The effect of “Barnga” is primarily a culture shock experience. Moriyama’s analysis found the participants learned the importance of adaptability, and the influence of the majority on the minority.

3. Implementation of two intercultural simulations

The present study reports on two intercultural simulations, “The Albatross” and “Rocket” conducted in a Japanese university classroom. “Rocket” is an intercultural teamwork simulation based on the International Space Station. Participants take on job roles within either the US, Japan, Russian or European space agencies, and work together to build a model rocket needed to send a message to astronauts at the space station. Each space agency learns information about their country’s culture, work style, politics, and budget which is used when negotiating with other space agencies and making their part of the mini rocket. The four space agencies work together to actually build a model mini rocket with materials such as PET bottles and cardboard.

3.1 Participants and data collection

The participants were junior college students

(females = 21, males = 1) in central Japan, age 19–20. The students were enrolled in an elective class on intercultural understanding. The simulations were conducted during class time and a questionnaire concerning the simulation experience was an assignment for the class. The questionnaires, consisting of two open-ended questions written in Japanese, were given to participants after the simulation and gathered the next week. The response data were translated into English, and read recursively in order to find themes. The themes were coded and put on the data.

4. Results

4.1 Results of “Albatross” simulation

As explained above, “The Albatross” simulation leads participants to take part in a welcome ceremony. Male-role and female-role participants have different greetings, places to sit and ways to eat and drink which results in most participants thinking that Albatross culture favors men over women. After the simulation students discussed their experience and Albatross behavior, followed by the facilitator explaining the thought and values that guide Albatross culture. Participants realized their misunderstandings due to evaluating Albatross culture by their own cultural standards. Following this debrief students wrote the questionnaire.

The first question asked students what they experienced in this simulation concerning learning a new culture. The responses described learning from their emotional reactions, ethnocentrism thinking, and their inability to accept Albatross behavior because they didn’t understand it. Emotional reactions to the new culture of uneasiness and resistance were described by half of the students [12]. Ethnocentrism influence on their judgments of Albatross behavior was recognized [6]. The need to learn the new culture’s values in order to accept the new behaviors was observed [8]. These findings align with the findings of Moriyama. The following excerpts illustrate how emotional reactions related to ethnocentrism and the need to know values behind behaviors.

“At first I felt uneasy and didn’t want to accept the other culture, but if I get used to it and understood the meaning I can accept the new culture.”

“I think I felt a lot of uneasiness because of my preconceptions of my own culture to things that are different. I realized it is not easy to accept a different culture when your own culture is built up slowly over the years.”

“At first when you take in a new culture there is resistance and uneasiness. But when you begin to understand the new culture it becomes interesting.”

The second question asked students to apply what they learned to ways a person could lessen stereotypes and mistakes in a new culture. Responses reflected the ideas in the first question, primarily being aware of ethnocentrism ideas [9], learning about the values of the new culture [9], along with very simplistic comments to just accept the new culture [4]. The following are representative responses,

“My interpretation can lead to stereotypes and misunderstanding, therefore, we need to experience the other culture and ask questions and learn the meaning of things.”

“If we experience the other culture we will judge less by our own culture’s viewpoint. Put energy into understanding the other culture.”

“Don’t put forth my own culture’s preconceptions, but quickly accept that which is different. Later when you have time to think you can ask why it is different”

4.2 Results of “Rocket” Simulation

Rocket simulation has participants divided into four space agencies, RSA (Russia Space Agency), JAXA (Japanese Aeronautic Exploration Agency),

NASA (National Aeronautic Space Agency, USA), and ESA (European Space Agency) which must work together to make a model mini rocket. The four teams did negotiate size and price and complete a model rocket. A message to astronauts was inserted in the rocket and placed on the launch pad. A countdown and an enactment of a lift off signaled the completion of the simulation. During debriefing each space agency briefly explained the cultural rules that influenced their actions. Then the facilitator described Hirshorn's data on how the International Space Station employees experienced cultural differences of promptness, work ethics, and decision making style. The participants then received a questionnaire in which the first question was intended to draw out lessons learned during the simulation, and the second question was intended to cause students to develop those lessons into suggestions or advice for future multicultural work situations.

The first question asked students what they learned about working with people of other cultures from this simulation. Responses showed that students observed cultural influences on work, particularly promptness standards and decision making styles [8]. They also described awareness of their own judgments of other cultures [8]. In light of these differences students also learned the need to accept differences and be flexible [6]. The following responses are representative,

"When another country does something that doesn't fit your own country's way of thinking or custom, you can have bad feelings and this can cause breakdowns in work. Particularly, I felt this when other countries' sense of time was different."

"This time I was an American . . . The Japanese team were not quick or clear to act and took quite a bit of time to finish their part of the rocket, however what they did was done well and added to the finished rocket."

"When working with people of another culture it is not only problems with words, but it is important to understand each other's cultural background. You will have problems if you don't know the other's culture and customs when problems arise. For example, when the Europeans suddenly left the room (for holiday), I didn't understand it and was surprised."

The second question asked for advice for Japanese people working in multicultural teams. The responses advised Japanese to improve communicate skills, and develop individual decision making skills. More than half of the students wrote about communication skills, primarily, don't hesitate, verbalize ideas and say things clearly [13]. Other students wrote more fundamental advice that communication is necessary to understand one another and to work together [6]. Valuing and verbally explaining Japanese culture was also written [4]. The following comments are representative of advice on communication,

"Japanese don't say clearly what they want to say and it is difficult for others to understand. What you want to say, say clearly."

"You need to communicate your own culture so that others understand it. Not only aligning with others but also standing up for your own culture is important."

The second question also drew advice for decision making skills. "Rocket" simulation has cultural information for each space agency which includes culturally specific decision making customs. For example, the Russian team must bring every decision to the project manager for final approval, the Americans have more individual authority over their area of responsibility and the Japanese must confer with all team members and seek consensus. Even though participants are familiar with the

consensus style of decision making, five students wrote that this style is too time consuming and can frustrate people of other cultures when working together. The following are representative comments,

“Seriousness is strong point of Japanese, but their lack of decisiveness and individual action is a weakness. Therefore, I think Japanese value on group action needs to shift focus to individual action.”

“At times to carefully confer with everyone is fine, but when it might harm your work at times it is important for individual to be able to make decisions.”

5. Discussion

This section will discuss the educational value of using these simulations in light of the need to develop students who can interact in a global environment. The definition of “global human resources” is multifaceted, however it will be simplified here as (1) communication skills, (2) personal skills, and (3) cultural understanding.

5.1 Educational Value of “The Albatross”

“The Albatross” appears to teach some aspects of cultural understanding, particularly emotional and cognitive aspects of accepting a different culture. The simulation experience was an emotional experience for most participants in which they felt some of the feelings of culture shock. Compared to non-experiential learning (reading, listening, watching), participants felt uneasiness about Albatross cultural practices which caused them to unconsciously judge them with cultural bias. During debrief, when the emotional influence was gone, the participants were able to recognize how they had evaluated Albatross too quickly which led to misunderstanding. The following comment demonstrates the power of experiential learning,

“When I read Harasawa’s text (reading on ethnocentrism) I thought, ‘I wouldn’t do that,’ ‘it doesn’t relate to me.’ But

through the simulation I was surprised to learn that I misunderstood the Albatross culture. I realized the content of the reading did relate to me also.”

Japanese students are used to conforming and often express that when in a new culture one needs to simply accept the new cultures’ behaviors as if they would not experience any resistance. Through this experience many students experienced that without cognitive understanding of the values of a new culture it is difficult to accept and practice new behaviors.

The second element of global human resources, personal skills, includes flexibility. Participants in the Albatross welcome ceremony experienced a different manner of greeting (using legs) and needed to respond when greeted by the Albatross representative. During the greeting and other parts of the ceremony they needed to practice flexibility.

5.2 Educational Value of “Rocket”

“Rocket” seemed to teach about communication skills and understanding of other cultures and their own Japanese culture. The most common response on the “Rocket” questionnaires was to not hesitate and verbalize ideas clearly. One participant described trying an assertive communication style,

“When I tried to accomplish one task, as I pressed my point a little I was able to see some progress and realized that even if the culture is different you can get a job done.”

“Rocket” was also valuable in understanding how culture can influence standards of promptness and styles of decision making. Most notable was how this simulation resulted in participants recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese culture. One quarter of the participants enacted JAXA members and three quarters enacted other cultures, and thus were in the position to observe Japanese culture. Participants wrote about becoming aware of the weaknesses of hesitant and vague communication

style common in Japan, and the time consuming consensus decision making style. Yet, there also were responses that showed awareness of positive aspects of Japanese culture when played out in an intercultural game. These positive aspects included seriousness, working carefully to produce a high quality model rocket fin, being cooperative, and politeness.

“Rocket” is a culturally specific simulation that clearly teaches cultural patterns of communication, relationship making and decision making in various countries. Educators in the intercultural field have voiced concerns about culturally specific simulations that may strengthen stereotypes. Hirshorn considered these concerns and created materials for a culturally general version of Rocket (<http://intercultural-rocket.com/>).

However, this study of “Rocket” showed positive effects of culturally specific exercises. Participants who were on the Japanese team and those who were on other teams observed the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese culture within a global work environment. Precisely because participants were instructed to take on the role of a specific culture, they seemed to be able to view Japanese culture in an objective manner. People who live outside their own culture have this experience of seeing their culture more objectively, but it is uncommon for people living within their own culture to have a culture-relative view.

5.3 Limitations

The results of this classroom practice report are not intended to be generalizable. Each time a simulation is conducted the results vary due to the participants, the facilitator and the context. In this study the participants were primarily women, who all knew each other. The facilitator had experience using the two simulations which enabled problem-free execution, however may have revealed educational objectives.

In the future, the debrief explanation, discussion and reflection questions can be improved to allow for a broader learning experience.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the effects of two intercultural simulations conducted in a class on intercultural understanding. Experiential learning, in particular intercultural simulations, provided an opportunity for students to broaden cognitive knowledge with emotional and behavioral experiences. The responses of these participants were related to the three elements of the global human resources definition. It was found that “The Albatross” provided understanding of cultures stress and how cultural misunderstandings develop. “Rocket” provided learning about work skills for a global environment, particularly communication skills and decision making. “Rocket” also seemed to provide a way for participants to view Japanese culture more objectively and see its strengths and weaknesses in a global work environment.

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