

Finding your Feet: Writing Activities for Multi- and Intercultural Communication Exchanges

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Introduction

A critical part of SJSU's mission is to promote global perspectives, in large part through our varied and interdisciplinary course offerings in culture and social life. Courses dealing with cultural, global, and international themes are offered in nearly all SJSU departments. Our students can expect to experience multi- and intercultural exchanges offline or online, in our classrooms or outside of them, on campus or in our local community. Such multicultural and intercultural exchanges are maximally beneficial when they involve critical reflection and sustained effort towards understanding the perspectives and lived experiences of others.

Materials and methods

Drawing on my training in applied cultural communication and the Ethnography of Communication (I have a PhD in this field) I drafted the workbook over two semesters. In Summer 2015 I tested the workbook with students participating in the Communication Studies Department's study abroad programs in Jyväskylä, Finland and Berlin, Germany.

Results

This project, which was designed to promote global perspectives as well as writing proficiency, produced a workbook titled "Finding your Feet: Writing Activities for Multi- and Intercultural Exchanges". The workbook contains a series of self-guided writing activities for engaging in, reflecting on, analyzing, understanding and successfully negotiating new cultural environments and the multi- and intercultural exchanges (broadly defined) that take place within them.

The workbook is comprised of an introduction, 10 interactive chapters, and a conclusion. Each chapter has an instruction section followed by applied writing activities, which are designed to engage students in reflection and analysis of the concepts introduced in each chapter. As a whole the workbook provides students with a "toolkit" for successfully unpacking new cultural environments and multi-/intercultural communication situations. Ideally, this workbook should contribute to SJSU's goals of supporting and implementing proactive writing strategies for undergraduates, and will also help students develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of their own roles as members of an increasingly multicultural and global society.

Target audiences include students who are enrolled in courses dealing with cultural, global, and international themes and students participating in the short-term, faculty-led study abroad programs run by Communication Studies faculty.

Conclusions

This project helped raise my students' awareness of issues, concepts, challenges, and strategies in navigating intercultural communication encounters. Based on the feedback I received, it successfully helped students become more attentive not only to people's communication but also the scenes and circumstances in which this communication took place. Most particularly, students in the two FLPs reported that this material helped raise their awareness of and sensitivity to different communicative styles, patterns, and habits in their new cultural environments. At the same time, my students' feedback suggested that while the concepts presented in the workbook were valuable, not all of the activities were suited to online/remote instruction. Given this, I will continue to revise and improve this important work. I thank the AANAPISI board for their tremendously valuable support — it is because of AANAPISI that I was able to complete this project.



Photo by Tyler Austrie, Berlin 2015

Sources

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