

Improving Strategies for Intercultural Communication through Simulated Experiences

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Abstract

The chorus of political, business, community and education leaders is drawing our attention to the need for improved intercultural communication competence. Student opportunities for study abroad, foreign language immersion and *global learning*, through the use of the Internet, are available but need to be provided on a larger scale. Even so, many students may not have such opportunities. To prepare students to take maximum advantage of these limited opportunities during their studies as well as after graduation, an alternative approach is needed. To this end, a simulation game has been developed, called the Cage Painting Simulator (CPS).

The *cage* is a metaphor for the combined effects of our cultural background, current context and life experiences on our perspectives, which are inescapable. Often, we are unaware of these effects, in which case the cage is invisible. To become more aware of our own background and that of others, according to the metaphor, we need to *paint* our cages. This *painting* refers to the process of co-constructing cultural perspectives, through dialog and reflection. Learners can paint their cages during study abroad experiences or when participating in global learning. We were inspired to think about ways in which students should prepare to optimise their global learning experiences by challenges that surfaced in our global learning projects related to the small window of opportunities due to differences in time zones as well as our students' unfamiliarity with other cultures.

The CPS comprises a sequence of scenarios that allows the learner to interact with a person of synthetic background. The learner's goal is to find out enough about the simulated person's culture to be able to achieve a common goal together. Cultural, contextual and experiential factors pose a challenge to achieving the common goal. At each step in the game, the user selects a response from among a

set of possible responses within a chat session. Each entry is scored according to how well they are painting cages with the simulated person. The score ranges from zero for unhelpful or neutral responses through to four for the case when both cages are painted. The simulation keeps track of a user's performance after a number of scenarios, to measure how well they have learned the cage painting strategy. Higher order learning is elicited with reflective guiding questions. The simulation also seeks information about the user's demographics and their feedback. Analysis of preliminary data indicates that the CPS provides a positive learning experience for learners from a range of backgrounds. Through new research findings and user feedback, the CPS game is being improved.

Key Words:

global learning
global communication competence
cage painting

Introduction

“...the goal should be to create life-long pilgrims who are on journey toward a lifestyle that is tuned in to perceiving cultural differences.” (Fox, 2003, p. 121)

As we began a preliminary dialogue about the focus of this paper, our discussion revolved around two thoughts; the growing need for intercultural understandings and for a world-view of oneness. We were reminded of the story of the first astronaut's perspective of the world. As they traveled into space, they looked back on the earth and were surprised to see no indication of national borders – nothing to indicate the end of one country and the beginning of another. Their view of the world had always been that of maps and globes with lines and different colors being used to break up the earth's landscape into separate areas. Mesmerized by this unexpected revelation, they experienced a resounding shift in their perspective of the world and according to their story, saw the earth as a single entity for the first time.

This recognition of the world's oneness might be described by some as the global village, the interdependent global community, or simply as the world community. Whatever the terminology, this understanding of all peoples around the world is critical to forwarding a viable future on earth. Only from the perspective of the earth as an interdependent global community that values human diversity, appreciates the finite nature of the earth's resources, and that can respectfully

dialogue between all peoples, will we be able to generate more thoughtful approaches to resolving differences and problems in a peaceful fashion.

Ongoing changes to the demographics and the global interconnectedness of the world mean that intercultural communication affects all aspects of our lives. While the world is becoming smaller in terms of the speed of communication, it is becoming larger in terms of our awareness of cultural diversity. Intercultural communication affects all aspects of our lives, as a result of increased local diversity stemming from immigration (Tuleja, 2005 p. 102) and global interconnectedness, made possible by modern communication technologies. It is vital that we better prepare for this reality.

Opportunities for study abroad, foreign language immersion and *global learning*, through the use of the Internet, need to be provided on a larger scale. Even so, many students and professionals may not have such opportunities. Furthermore, when the opportunity does arise, time-zone differences and other constraints often do not allow for interactions to fully develop into deeper learning experiences (Alagic, Gibson, & Haack, 2002; Watters, Rogers, Gibson, Alagic, & Haack, 2004, April). To prepare students to take maximum advantage of these limited opportunities as well as for life after graduation, an alternative approach is needed. Along with Fox (2003), we recognize that nothing can take the place of actual experience and we agree that there are other ways to prepare for such experiences.

To prepare for this new reality, we proposed a new, unifying conceptual framework in the form of a *cage painting* metaphor (Rimington, Gibson, Gibson, & Alagic, 2004). Our contention is that this new metaphor embodies dialogic co-construction of intercultural understandings and overcomes some limitations of existing metaphors. For example, we identify three risks associated with the cultural lens metaphor, namely cultural agnosia, lack of cultural acuity and the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. So, rather than pigeonholing people of other cultures with a tool that (a) is blind to certain characteristics, (b) offers insufficient resolution of detail and (c) distorts the results through its own cultural basis, we proposed an approach that is more flexible, evolutionary and context sensitive.

Based on that metaphor, we designed the Cage Painting Simulation (CPS), which is intended to provide scenario-based learning experiences with the goal of improving intercultural competences. The cage-painting simulator attempts to provide a virtual intercultural learning experience. The prototype simulator presents the user with a series of scenarios and some explanation of the cage-

painting concept. It provides a context, a goal and a character of unknown cultural background for each scenario. Part of the challenge is to understand how this cultural background will affect achievement of the goal.

Definitions

Culture. The traditional approach to defining culture has been to relate it to differences in race, nationality, ethnicity or geographic region, but with continued migration, diversity has increased in many places to the point that these differences are no longer useful (Wiseman, 2002). More useful are definitions such as a “learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people” (Lustig & Koester, 1999 p. 30).

Intercultural Communication. Barnett and Lee (2002) define intercultural communication as the, “...exchange of information about culture between two groups of people with significantly different cultures.” Further, they define this as being within a common environment with a view to reducing uncertainty about each others’ future behaviour through improved understanding.

Global Learning. In addition to this exchange, global learning (Rimmington, 2003) integrates metacognitive development arising from dialogic co-construction of meaning about both cultures. The cage painting metaphor, described in the following section, provides a conceptual framework for a deeper understanding of the global learning processes, which goes beyond mere exchange or transmission of cultural information.

Global Learning Competence. Intercultural communication competence “...involves the knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures” (Wiseman, 2002, p. 208). Wiseman elaborates on cognitive orientations favourable to developing appropriate knowledge such as open-mindedness and self-monitoring ability. Communicators must guide their motivation toward inter-cultural sensitivity and empathy for others, and away from ethnocentrism and avoidance. The skills include: being mindful, appropriate self-disclosure, interaction involvement, interaction management, identity maintenance, uncertainty reduction strategies, and appropriate display of respect and face support; which are relevant to cage painting.

According to Langer (1989a; 1989b; 1997) mindfulness is being aware of our own and others’ behaviours in the situation and being attentive to the process of communication. On the other hand, mindlessness implies habitual ways of thinking and behaving without conscious awareness of our underlying intentions

and or emotions. Mindful identity negotiation (Langer, 1989a; 1989b; 1997) is an essential skill for building global learning competence. In obtaining accurate knowledge of self and others in an intercultural encounter, Langer suggests four possible descriptors of the levels of mindfulness: unconscious incompetent; conscious incompetent; unconscious competent; conscious competent. We consider mindfulness as underpinning the other skills identified by Wiseman.

Constructing Global Learning Competence. Our communication with other people usually happens within a context broader than just communicating for the sake of communication. Whether the setting is educational or professional, intercultural communication competency can be subsumed under global communication and/or global learning. The goal is for global communication to become a “mindful” (Langer, 1989a) activity as participants negotiate their respective identities in any one interaction (Abrams, O'Connor, & Giles, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Such interactions will uncover differences and similarities between cultures and as the cages are painted, the patterns of encoding and decoding of messages will be revealed. This is an ongoing process (Jensen, 2003), in which there is always the risk of committing the *faux pas*, but experienced intercultural communicators allow for such possibilities; and it is often the source of humour that helps overcome anxiety about offending the other person. The cage painting metaphor captures not only those attributes associated with each culture *per se*, but also the context within which the intercultural communication is taking place.

The learning outcome being sought with this pedagogical approach is not the development of a cultural profile (e.g., Hofstede, 1991; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) that serves as a stereotype for later interactions, or as a predictor, but the realization that such an approach is strategies for articulating the characteristics of a person from another culture for new instances of intercultural communication.

Framing the problem

Kim's (2001) theory of cross-cultural adaptations refers to situations when a person migrates into a place with a different culture and goes through the process of adjustment to the new environment. Boundary conditions that Kim sets are having a primary socialization in one culture and at least minimal dependence and engagement in the host environment. Assumptions of an innate capacity to adapt to environmental challenges through communication bring about the third assumption of Kim's theory of cross-cultural adaptation; “Adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that brings about a qualitative transformation of the individual.” (p.37)

Broader questions

Global adaptation is a level beyond the migrational adaptation process described by Kim (2001), which refers to the migrant adapting to the culture of the host culture. As we connect via global communication technologies, both interactants need to adapt to each other's experiential, contextual and cultural characteristics. In the emerging "global village" (McLuhan, 1962) all parties must adapt and move towards a greater awareness of intercultural issues (Young, 1996). How do we find the path of mutual transformation towards global learning competency and global adaptation?

We speculate that the main characteristics of global communication theory are emerging from current theories of intercultural communication. Gudykunst and Mody (2002) have grouped existing theories of intercultural communication into five partially overlapping categories. They are concerned with effective outcomes, accommodation of adaptation, identity management and negotiation, communication networks and acculturation or adjustment. Of particular interest in the context of cage painting is the category of identity management and negotiation theories. For example, the theories of identity negotiation and cross-cultural face-negotiation of Ting-Toomey (1999), help to describe the interactions taking place during cage painting.

Kim's guiding questions (p.10) are "What is the common trajectory of the cross cultural adaptation process that unfolds over time? How does the trajectory begin and move in the direction of intercultural transformation?" The domain in which these questions are considered (cross cultural communication) can be broadened to the domain of global communication and global learning. Although we are not focusing on someone immersing into another culture, there are significant elements of cross cultural adaptation that are relevant when preparing one self for effective intercultural/global communication and global learning. Our focus is on instances of the need to achieve certain goals, learning or professional through collaboration between individuals of different cultures.

Our questions

Each new global learning challenge offers an opportunity to grow beyond the boundaries of our own culture. Adjustment to global learning environments, regardless of circumstances, requires some skills of a general nature, such as active listening skills, noticing similarities and differences during interactions, recognizing subtle intercultural communication challenges, reflecting in action

(Dewey, 1933), interpreting the other's messages in the given context, and recognizing one's own frame of reference, as well as the other's.

Assuming that quality intercultural virtual scenario-based experiences provide a step forward on the trajectory of the global communication adaptation, how should those scenarios be designed and used in the framework of a transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991)? How should related research be conducted to determine what factors (external and internal) provide for usefulness of this approach? Furthermore, how can our vision be widely implemented?

In what follows, we (a) describe the cage-painting metaphor as a conceptual framework for the dialogic co-construction of intercultural understandings, (b) demonstrate/describe a simulation environment within the Cage Painting Simulation (CPS), (c) report about research findings emerging from the first implementation of CPS, and (d) discuss a vision for a broader, widely available CPS implementation as an online, user-driven database.

Cage Painting Metaphor: Dialogic co-construction of intercultural understandings

“Learning intercultural communication would proceed better if it proceeded through relatively complex and carefully constructed simulations of culturally embedded institutional talk contexts, and focused not on rules but on strategies and critique.” (Young, 1969, p. 182)

Cage painting involves mindfulness (Langer, 1997) and facilitation of interaction, as metacognitive processes in which the participants are aware of the learning strategies being used. It requires self-disclosure (painting one's own cage) appropriate to the context. Uncertainty is reduced through cumulative, mutual self-disclosure (gradually being able to see more clearly each other's cage as well as one's own cage) (see Figure 1A-E). Appropriateness includes respect and face support (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

The cage-painting metaphor, as a dynamic entity, captures essential aspects of both the process and structure of intercultural communication. The cage (Mackay, 1994) is a representation of our perspective, and its bars further represent details (characteristics) of our life experiences, cultural background, and current context, which affect our *world view*. We cannot escape our cage. At any one time, we paint (perceive) those bars (characteristics) that are relevant to the prevailing context. We need to be continually painting our cage because our circumstances

and related perspectives evolve with time and alter with context. To elaborate the metaphor further, the paint on some bars fades with time unless they are painted regularly. It is important to mention that we cannot paint our cages in isolation. “Any true understanding is dialogic in nature...” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.102). A corollary to this postulate is that perceptions can become extreme in nature in the absence of social moderation.

The cage-painting metaphor captures “characteristics” (see Figure 1F) as individual bars. This approach is flexible; it allows for the selection of characteristics relevant to a particular context. The number and combination of characteristics will vary from one context to another. Two people from different backgrounds will paint different bars depending on their current context and on their backgrounds. Some characteristics of their background may have a significant effect on communication while collaboratively achieving a goal, but some may have less or no effect.

The collaborators need to understand how the life experience, language, history, geography, religion, politics, culture and context constitute each other’s cage as well as their own. Then, they can paint the cage bars to ensure that messages will pass through them without distortion. In other words, the recipient will be able to interpret the message as the sender intended. This often involves first recognizing and then unlearning misconceptions and stereotyping before relearning the reality of the recipient’s world.

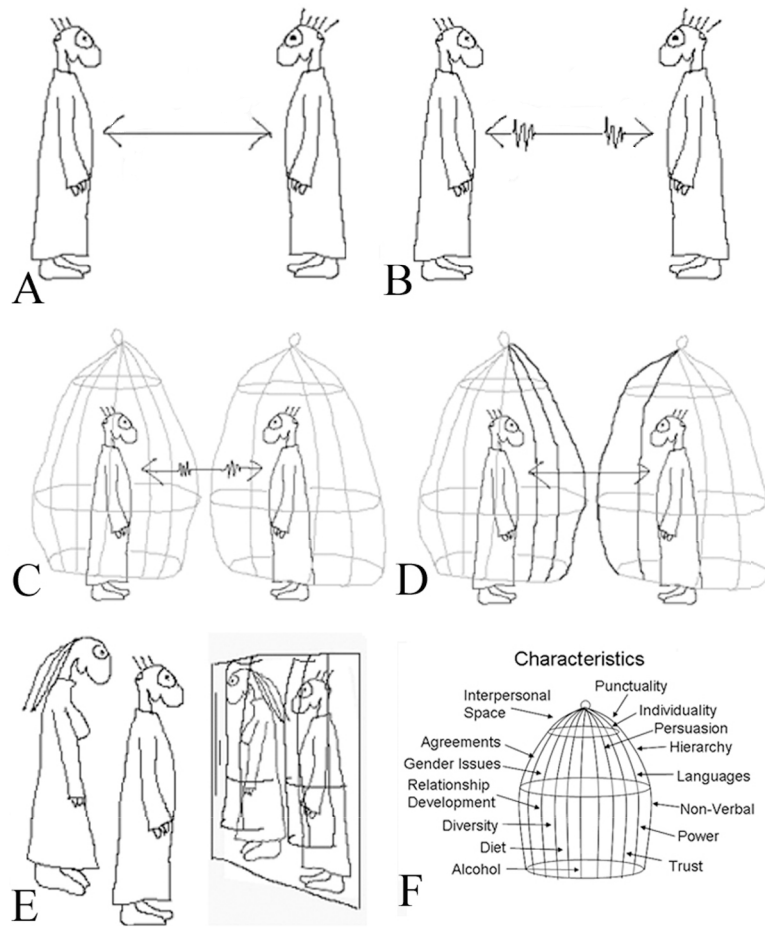


Figure 1

(A) Idealized view of communication between two people, (B) more realistic view with distortion of messages, (C) distortion of messages by invisible cage, (D) cage-painting to remove distortion, (E) critical co-reflection needed to paint cages, and (F) characteristics captured while painting cages. Adapted from Rimmington, et al., (2004).

The act of painting a cage bar involves both negotiation of meaning about a cultural issue (represented by the bar) and achieving this while ‘saving face’ on a mutual basis. This requires reflection (see Figure 1E). This is supported by the theories of identity negotiation and cross-cultural face-negotiation of Ting-Toomey (1999).

We can never entirely paint our own cage bars or those of the recipient; like the ongoing, never ending process of co-constructing cultural identity (Jensen, 2003). But, we can continue efforts for mutual understanding, keeping in mind existing constraints, some obvious/painted and some invisible. Our continued painting may reveal differences in the visibility of our bars both over time and depending on context. We may even recognize some incongruities within and among observed characteristics.

To understand another person's utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it, to find the proper place for it in the corresponding context. For each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we, as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words. ...the greater their number and weight, the deeper and more substantial our understanding will be... Any true understanding is dialogic in nature. Understanding is to utterance as one line of dialogue is to the next... (Bakhtin, 1986, p.102)

Every metaphor has its limitations. During presentations and discussions about the cage-painting metaphor some unexpected interpretations and negative reactions have been encountered. Some people have felt that a *cage* is an oppressive idea akin to a prison, so they dislike it. However, its encapsulating quality is important for the metaphor to work in that our perception of the world is an inescapable quality of our existence. Before seeing a diagram of the cage, some people imagined it to be a rectangular box with solid walls on three sides and bars on the front, as in the cage for a zoo animal or a jail. They imagined that only the solid walls would be painted and the significance of painting bars to reduce miscommunication was lost.

Once we presented diagrams (see Figure 1A-E) to an audience, showing a cage with bars around the person and the way they affect the shaping of outgoing messages and interpretation of incoming messages, the concept became easier to understand. Certainly, the concept of how the bars affect intercultural communication is more complex than the idea of looking through a *cultural lens* (e.g., that of Hofstede, 1991). For instance, the bars are initially invisible and may remain so until we interact with someone. Only when we experience the frustration of their misinterpretation of our messages, do we realize that the bars are there. As we begin to understand how our life experiences, culture and context (embedded in our bars) affect communication, they are being *painted*. Only then, do we see the need to consider them as we shape or interpret messages. They capture self-awareness and increased awareness of the perspectives of others.

Cage Painting Simulation: Virtual intercultural communication experiences

Constraints in time and other resources often resulted in brief opportunities for intercultural interaction during global learning classes. Therefore, we became concerned about ensuring that participants were well prepared to derive as much benefit as possible from these interactions. This led to the idea of a simulator that students could use to learn strategies for improving intercultural communication. Such strategies include how to paint their cage bars for someone from another culture, how to elicit painting cage bars by that person, how to frame questions, how to reflect and validate each other's cage-painting and how to not unintentionally offend the other person.

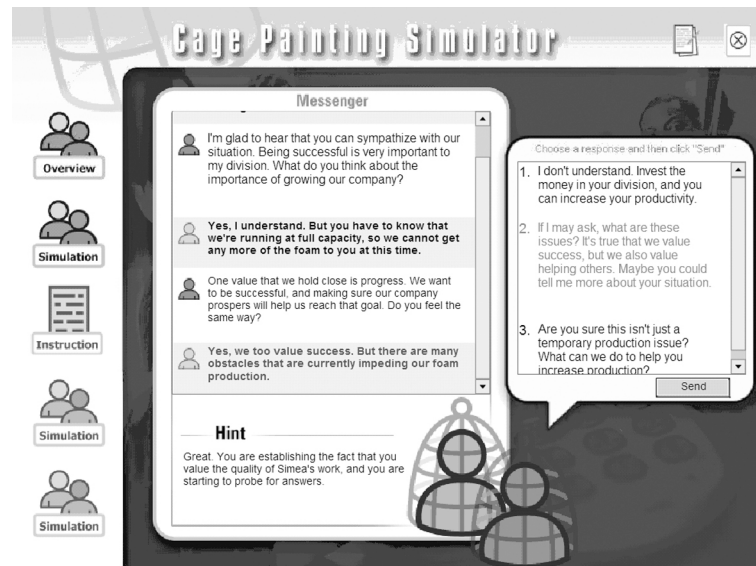


Figure 2

The interface for the CPS prototype software showing choices for contributions on the right, with an ongoing online dialog in the centre, and cages at the bottom. *Adapted from Alagic, Rimmington, and Gibson (2005).*

The Cage-Painting Simulation (see Figure 2) attempts to provide a virtual intercultural learning experience. The prototype CPS presents the user with a series of scenarios and some explanation of the cage-painting concept. It provides a context, a goal and a synthetic character (Simea) of unknown cultural background for each scenario. Part of the challenge is to understand how this cultural background will affect achievement of the goal. Under pressure to meet

deadlines, the user must maintain a discipline of painting cages so both the user/student and Simea can achieve the common goal (Alagic et al., 2005).

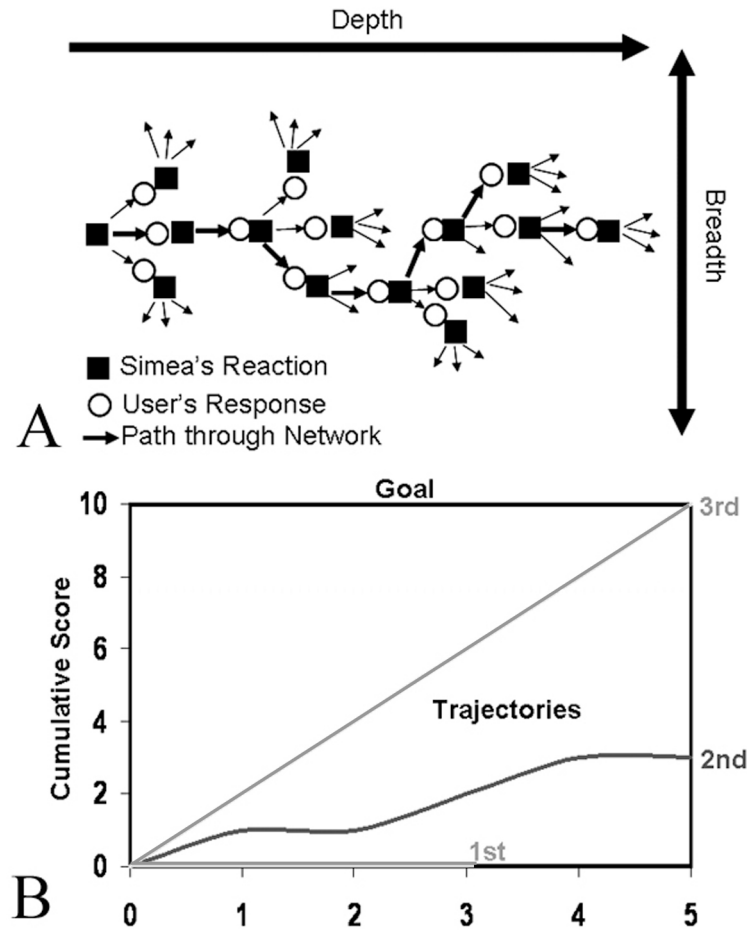


Figure 3

(A) Possible paths of the user through the scenario map, which depends on the choice of contributions to an interactive chat session, and (B) typical trajectories for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd scenarios as the user improves their cage painting performance. *Adapted from Alagic et al., (2005).*

The user navigates through a map of possible paths (see Figure 3A) by selecting responses to Simea in the interactive chat session (see Figure 2). If the user makes choices that result in cage painting, a higher score is generated (see Figure 4). Scores within a scenario accumulate. As the user makes better choices in subsequent scenarios the trajectory for the cumulative score improves, as

illustrated in Figure 3B. Scores range from 0 for no cage painting through to 2 for responses that result in mutual cage painting. In this prototype version, the user sees the cage bars become darker (see Figure 2), but does not see any numerical score.

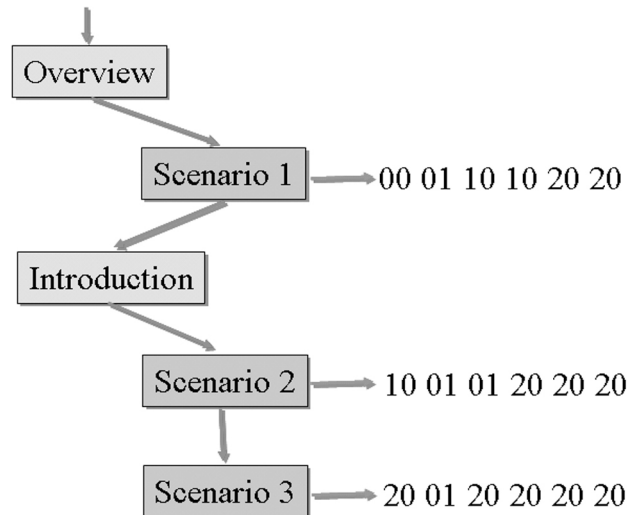


Figure 4

Linear structure of learning activities and generation of user performance data by the CPS prototype

To study the learning behavior of the user, the CPS prototype generates scores (see Figure 4) and these are gathered for analysis. Most users exhibit progressively better scores as each scenario proceeds and this progression itself improves in subsequent scenarios (see Figure 5A). These slopes can themselves be analyzed to determine a rate of learning or Learning Index (LI) and a Starting Point (SP) (see Figure 5B) for each user. Values for SP and LI can then be analyzed in terms of demographic information or characteristics of the scenarios. At this point, with only three scenarios in the CPS prototype version, such derived data has questionable value; but with an expansion of the number and variety of scenarios, patterns of learning and their associations with a range of factors can be analyzed.

The CPS prototype operates on a CD and constrains the user to a linear series of learning activities with just three different scenarios that are presented in random

order. The scenarios are all contextualized within the business, work-environment domain. Each deals with only one contextual, life-experience or cultural issue.

CPS Prototype: Ongoing research

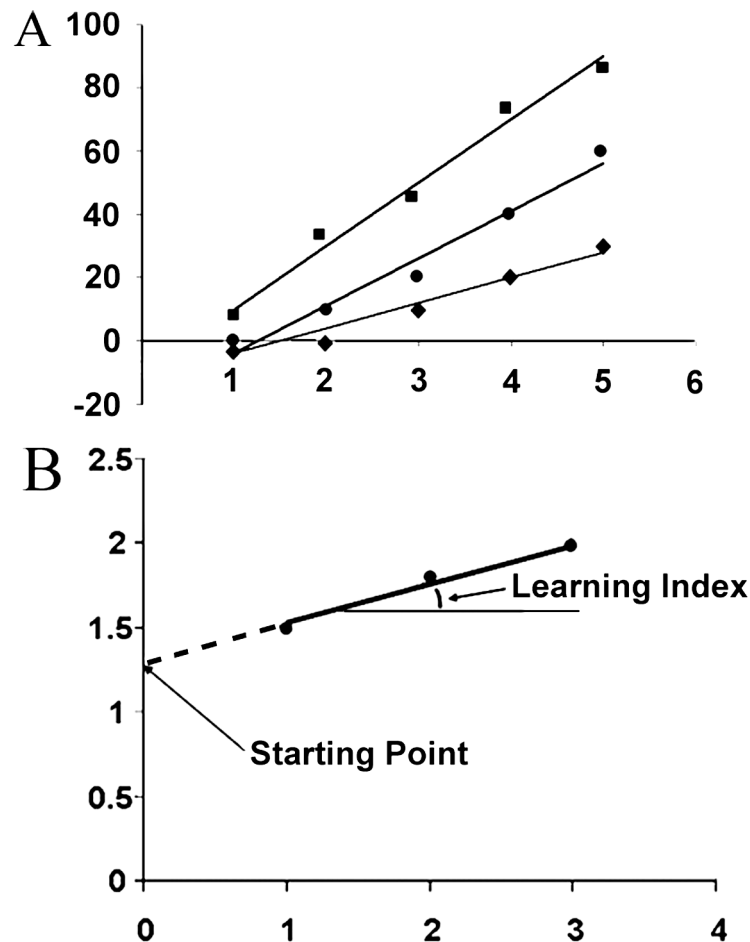


Figure 5

(A) Change in slopes of trajectories for successive scenarios, and (B) derivation of the Starting Point as the zero intercept and the Learning Index as the slope of the slopes in A. Adapted from Alagic et al., (2005).

The CPS prototype was trialed with 117 users during the second half of 2005 (see Figure 6). Users were asked to complete associated survey instruments (see Figure 7), which revealed demographic information and provided feedback on the value

and usability of the CPS prototype. A guided reflective journal was an integral part of the CPS. At key points of the simulation, users were asked to reflect on their thinking about interacting with Simea. This gave us information about their metacognitive insight into and understanding of intercultural communication strategies (cage painting).

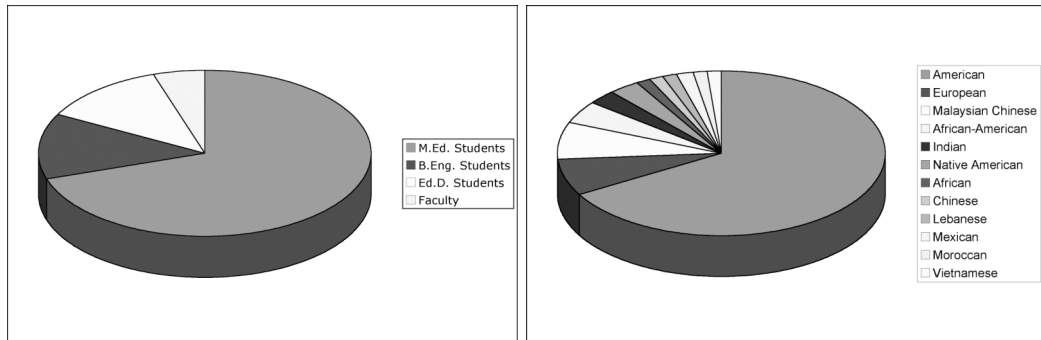


Figure 6
Backgrounds of the users in the 2005 trial of the CPS prototype.

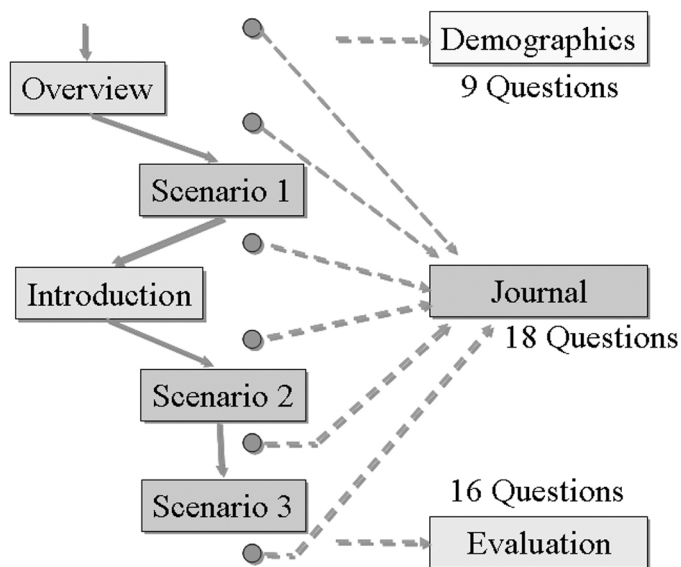


Figure 7
Data collection associated with the use of the CPS prototype during the 2005 trial.

Conclusions: Vision for the Cage Painting Simulation

During the 2005 trial of the CPS prototype, we formatively assessed the results for each group (see Figures 3-7) and discussed possible future changes in the format, administration and content of the various components. Our considerations included the need for a larger sample group, a larger and more diverse set of scenarios, and the desire to inform our investigations by existing research in global learning, intercultural communication and related fields.

Review of the relevant literature revealed Fox's (2003) seven laws in his fiction-based model of intercultural training, which provides an initial framework from which to analyze and refine CPS. This section begins with the application of Fox's framework to the CPS environment and its use. It continues with our long-term goals related to online access and future research.

Deconstructing CPS

Fox (2003, p. 121) provides a rationale for his claim that "Literature can be used to produce a level of experience, which will fill a gap in the intercultural learning process." In a similar manner, CPS scenarios provide virtual and hypothetical global communication experiences to fill the gap in global learning processes. Fox proposes seven laws, specific to his fiction-based model of intercultural training. He specifies them as: emotive experience, reflexivity, attention, complementarity, variety, pilgrimage, and do-be-know.

Emotive experience. It is our perception that there are two reactions toward the cage painting metaphor: (1) initially, a negative reaction to the concept of *cage* (preconception); and (2) visualization of painting invisible cage bars often prompts comments of understanding but not always acceptance of the metaphor (nature of the metaphor).

Reflexivity. According to the learning theories, all learning cycles between abstract conceptualisation and reflective inspection of the experience (Kolb, 1984). Since this is not a direct experience with another (often stereotyped) culture, a reflective inspection of the virtual experience is essential. Incorporating a guided reflective journal as part of this virtual experience facilitates uncovering strategies for intercultural communication by allowing learners to reflect on observed behaviours of synthetic characters and their own role in the virtual dialog.

Attention. Incorporating motivational factors in order to keep the learner focused on the CPS is one of the ongoing challenges. Implementing this model, as with any other model that has expected learning outcomes, requires careful attention to both extrinsic (Why should I be doing this?) and intrinsic factors (I like this because...).

Complementarity and Variety. Complementarity and variety supplement each other. Variety of case scenarios contributes to conceptualising a necessity of a reciprocal dialog (painting cages) in order to accomplish a common task. At the other end, virtual experiences in isolation are not going to contribute to a step forward on the trajectory of developing global learning competence. Combining this experience with other experiential and didactical (such as Fox's focus on selected literature) broadens a variety of learning opportunities.

Pilgrimage. Developing global learning competence is an ongoing journey, not a one-time event. We think about CPS as a step in the direction of conceptualising an awareness of what intercultural communication is about; developing strategies to elicit and sense cultural differences and respond sensitively to such; and becoming able to effectively communicate and function in different contexts. This step requires an ability to reflect on the characteristics of our own culture in order to understand another culture.

Do-be-know versus know-be-do. "Experience is the gateway to knowledge" (Fox, 2003 p. 121). Contemporary learning theories emphasize that the learning cycle approach produces the best learning result if it starts with an experience (Kolb, 1984; Lawson, Abraham, & Renner, 1989), and that the learning cycle approach can stimulate self-regulated learning (Yeotis, Gibson, & Alagic, 2004). CPS is designed to provide discovery-type experiences, although virtual, followed by reflective processing in order to ensure active learning.

CPS Online: Open Access

Our vision is that a searchable CPS database system will support accessibility to broad audiences, providing virtual experiences with feedback and opportunities to create and post new CPS scenarios. In this manner, we plan to diversify contexts of scenarios, allow and support multiple languages, and provide the user with their CPS-based cultural profile. To accomplish this we challenge ourselves with the following goals.

Goal One: Anyone anywhere should be able to play CPS and get multiple forms of feedback about their global learning competence.

Goal Two: Anyone anywhere should be able to contribute scenarios with new contexts and characteristics.

Goal Three: Scenarios should be organized into a searchable database, categorized in order to meet the needs of different audiences.

Suggestions for Further Research

We will use empirical data generated by online use of CPS on a broader scale to better understand the range of global learning aspects, from factors affecting individual trajectories to those enhancing the construction of global communication competence. Furthermore, we want to contribute to the existing knowledge base about developing intercultural and global communication competence. We will develop a theoretical framework based on the existing literature, including Fox's seven laws, to define a global learning theory within which we will investigate global adjustment and developing global learning competence. These understandings will direct continuous improvement of the CPS database system as a research tool.

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Kay Gibson has taught at Wichita State University since 1998 in the areas of Curriculum and Instruction, and Gifted Education. Prior to that, she was at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia for nine years. While in Australia, she completed her Ph.D., which examined conceptions of giftedness held by Australian Aborigines. Kay has used global learning experiences in her gifted education courses since 2002 with the result that a number of her graduate students are now incorporating similar global learning activities into their K-12 classrooms. She was the recipient of the Global Learning Course Redevelopment Team Excellence Award in 2002. Before teaching at the university level, she was an elementary school principal and teacher for almost twenty years in New South Wales, Australia and the United States.

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Mara Alagic received her PhD from the University of Belgrade. She was faculty at the University of Sarajevo (1975 to 1990), and visiting faculty at the University of Vermont (1990 to 1992). At the moment, Dr. Alagic is an associate professor at the Wichita State University. Her interest in developing intercultural communication and global learning competence stems from having taught in culturally diverse environments and pioneered global learning projects at the Wichita State University. She was the recipient of the Global Learning Course Redevelopment Team Excellence Award in 2002. In addition to integrating global learning into her classes, she mentors other faculty in implementing their global learning projects.

Title of the Paper: Improving Strategies for Intercultural Communication through Simulated Experiences

Main description: The chorus of political, business, community and education leaders is drawing our attention to the need for improved intercultural communication competence. Student opportunities for study abroad, foreign language immersion and *global learning*, through the use of the Internet, are available but need to be provided on a larger scale. Even so, many students may not have such opportunities. To prepare students to take maximum advantage of these limited opportunities during their studies as well as after graduation, an alternative approach is needed. To this end, a simulation game has been developed, called the Cage Painting Simulator (CPS).

The *cage* is a metaphor for the combined effects of our cultural background, current context and life experiences on our perspectives, which are inescapable. Often, we are unaware of these effects, in which case the cage is invisible. To become more aware of our own background and that of others, according to the metaphor, we need to *paint* our cages. This *painting* refers to the process of co-constructing cultural perspectives, through dialog and reflection. Learners can paint their cages during such experiences as study abroad and global learning. We were inspired to think about ways in which students should prepare to optimise their global learning experiences by challenges that surfaced in our global learning projects related to the small window of opportunities due to differences in time zones as well as our students' unfamiliarity with other cultures,.

The CPS comprises a sequence of scenarios that allows the learner to interact with a person of synthetic background. The learner's goal is to find out enough about the simulated person's culture to be able to achieve a common goal together. Cultural, contextual and experiential factors pose a challenge to achieving the common goal. At each step in the game, the user selects a response from among a set of possible responses within a chat session. Each entry is scored according to how well they are painting cages with the simulated person. The score ranges from zero for unhelpful or neutral responses through to 4 for the case when both cages are painted. The simulation keeps track of a user's performance after a number of scenarios, to measure how well they have learned the cage painting strategy. Higher order learning is elicited with reflective guiding questions. The simulation also seeks information about the user's demographics and their feedback. Analysis of preliminary data indicates that the CPS has potential to provide a positive learning experience. Through new research findings and user feedback, the CPS game is being improved.

Short Description: A computer prototype simulation has been developed to help future graduates prepare to meet the demands of increasing levels of Internet-based intercultural communication.

Keywords:

Global Learning

Global Communication Competence

Cage Painting