Simulations to Help Students Develop Greater Empathy

Educator successfully identifies and facilitates a simulation in which students take on different roles and perspectives, resulting in the development of greater empathy.

Key Method

The educator selects or creates a simulation designed to help students develop empathy. The educator facilitates student participation in the simulation and engages students in a reflective debrief of the experience.

Method Components

What is a simulation?

A simulation is an instructional practice that engages students in a role-playing scenario. Each student takes on a given role, and together they participate in a simulated real-world event or activity. Simulations do not need to be complicated, but every student should have a role and the opportunity to participate in a sustained role-playing experience.

Simulations can be used to introduce a topic or launch a unit of study. For example, a study of immigration might begin with a simulation of the immigration process experienced by the millions of people who came through Ellis Island during its peak years. Roles could include immigration officers, doctors, legal inspectors, a currency exchange teller, ferry boat captain, and railroad ticket seller as well as individual immigrants, all with specific character profiles for students to inhabit. As another example, a landmine simulation could be used to introduce the global issue of landmines. Students would walk across a designated area and enact an assigned role of being injured, killed, or surviving to bring landmine statistics to life.

Simulations also work well as culminating experiences, challenging students to apply their learning in a meaningful context. For example, in a courtroom simulation students would play the roles of plaintiff, defendant, attorneys, witnesses, judge, and jury. Another example is a task force simulation where students take on the perspectives of different stakeholders coming together to discuss a significant issue or solve a problem.

How do simulations help students develop greater empathy?

Creating a classroom environment where diverse perspectives—especially those that are significantly different from the students’ own—are valued and integrated into the learning experience helps students develop empathy. Simulations give students the opportunity to take on the role of another person and embody a perspective different from their own, which helps them understand the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others. Putting themselves in another person’s shoes, imagining what it would be like to experience the situation from that person’s perspective, and acting on those imagined thoughts and feelings helps students develop greater empathy. Simulations also require students to engage in collaboration and problem-solving, working together with students from various cultural backgrounds and learning about each other’s cultural norms in the process.
How is empathy connected to global competence?
Empathy is a critical component of global competence (see the Resources section for more information). The ability to empathize with the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others is key to effective communication and collaboration. Given the complexities of life in a globalized society, where local actions have a global impact and the challenges we face can only be solved through cooperative action, empathy guides us to communicate and collaborate from a place of greater understanding and respect, for the good of all (see the Start Empathy Toolkit in the Resources section).

Suggested Implementation Strategies
1. Select or design a simulation appropriate to the age/grade of the students and the subject area/curriculum you are teaching. See the example simulations listed in the Resources section and read the Teaching Tolerance article “Classroom Simulations: Proceed with Caution” (see Resources) for some important considerations.
   a. Envision how the simulation will play out to ensure that it meets your instructional goals and provides students an opportunity to develop greater empathy.
   b. Determine how students will be organized/assigned to their roles in the simulation.
   c. Plan for ways to support students as they process what they are thinking and learning during the simulation. For example, consider using the “Circle of Viewpoints” Visible Thinking routine (see Resources) to help students articulate the perspective they are taking in their role.
   d. Script a series of questions for the reflective debrief at the end of the simulation and/or select a protocol (such as the “I Used to Think... Now I Think...” routine in the Resources section) for the debrief. Consider questions/prompts that will lead students to make connections between their experiences in the simulation and the development of greater empathy.
   e. Prepare the physical space and any materials needed for facilitating the simulation.
2. Guide students through the experience of the simulation.
   a. Observe students carefully during the simulation and take notes as needed so you can help them refer back to the details of the simulation during the debrief conversation.
3. Facilitate the reflective debrief process. Have students write an individual reflection before and/or after the whole-class discussion

Supporting Research
Classroom simulations are a best-practice pedagogical strategy that involve active, student-centered, and collaborative learning (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 2005). As an example of project-based learning and assessment, simulations are highly motivating and engaging for students (Khattri, Kane, and Reeve, 1995).

A simulation is an authentic instructional method that engages students in the construction of knowledge (Newmann and Wehlage, 1993; Newmann, King, and Carmichael, 2007). Simulations provide an authentic learning environment where students are able to “explore, discuss, and meaningfully construct concepts and relationships in contexts that involve real-world problems and projects that are relevant to the learner” (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 1999). Simulations have been shown to have a positive effect on student learning and achievement (Hattie, 2009). They have also been shown to foster greater global citizenship in terms of cross-cultural understanding and awareness, responsibility for world problems, and trust in the international system (Myers, 2012).


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Resources

Global competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions individuals need to be successful in today’s interconnected world and to be fully engaged in and act on issues of global significance. The Global Competence Task Force defined globally competent individuals as “those who use their knowledge and skills to investigate the world beyond their immediate environment, recognize their own and others’ perspectives, communicate their ideas effectively with diverse audiences, and translate their ideas into appropriate actions” (see link below).

Example Global Competence Frameworks

- The Global Competence Matrix was created through a collaboration between World Savvy, Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Asia Society. The matrix identifies components of global competence, which assists educators as they foster global competence in themselves and develop it in their students.

- Global Competencies: 21st Century Skills Applied to the World was developed by the Global Competence Task Force, formed and led by the Council of Chief State School Officers’ EdSteps Initiative and the Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning [https://www2.ed.gov/about/announcements/2016-17/pdf/100612.pdf](https://www2.ed.gov/about/announcements/2016-17/pdf/100612.pdf) (see page 5)

Example Global Issues

- Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform

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graders.

• Examples of Simulations Described on Edutopia
  - Simulations Can Change the Course of History...Classes
    http://www.edutopia.org/blog/simulations-can-change-history-classes-matt-levinson
  - Civic Mirror: Simulated Nation Building for Middle Schoolers
    http://www.edutopia.org/blog/civic-mirror-simulated-nation-building-aaron-kaio
  - Historia: Game-Based Learning for Middle School History
    http://www.edutopia.org/blog/short-happy-history-of-historia-rick-brennan

• Facing the Future curriculum includes a variety of simulations. For example, the interdisciplinary
  curriculum unit, “Buy, Use, Toss?: A Closer Look at the Things We Buy” includes a simulation in which
  students take on the roles of various stakeholders to analyze the sustainability of various resource-
  extraction methods. In another simulation, students role-play stakeholder groups that are encouraged
  to form alliances in order to reach consensus on the best plan for dealing with waste in their
  community. The “Climate Change: Connections and Solutions” unit includes a simulation to help
  students understand limits imposed by environmental regulations and a simulation in which students
  experience how resources are distributed and used by different people based on access to wealth,
  paying attention to the environmental and social impacts of resource consumption. Additional units
  are available.
  https://www.facingthefuture.org/collections

• Get Into Character: Develop Empathy Through Drama shows how participating in a dramatic role-
  playing activity helps students develop greater empathy for the elderly,
  https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-empathy

• The Global Village Simulation at Heifer International’s ranch in Perryville, Arkansas, gives students the
  opportunity to experience a recreation of daily life in a developing country, learning firsthand about
  hunger, poverty, and sustainability,
  http://www.edutopia.org/heifer-international-global-village-video

• The ICONS Project creates simulations and scenario-driven exercises to advance participants’
  understanding of complex problems and strengthen their ability to make decisions, think strategically,
  and negotiate collaboratively. ICONS offers interactive online simulations that immerse students in the
  roles of decision-makers charged with resolving contentious global issues,
  http://www.icons.umd.edu/education/home

• Model United Nations is an authentic simulation in which students take on the role of delegates and
  work together to address global concerns. They debate current issues, prepare draft resolutions,
  negotiate with other “ambassadors” and strive to resolve world problems as representatives of the
  international community.
  http://www.unausa.org/global-classrooms-model-un

• The Oxfam Hunger Banquet is a simulation of global poverty and hunger, where participants are
  randomly divided into high-, middle-, and low-income groups and served different meals according to
  each tier. Oxfam’s Toolkit includes “character tickets” with short profiles of individuals, based on real
people, living in each income bracket. Participants take on these roles as they experience the “hunger banquet,”
http://www.oxfamamerica.org/take-action/events/hunger-banquet/

- **Population Education** offers a number of simulations for various grade levels, including the following free preview activities:
  - Food for Thought
    https://www.populationeducation.org/node/974
  - For the Common Good (Something for Everyone)
    https://www.populationeducation.org/node/993
  - Population Circle
    https://www.populationeducation.org/node/993
  - The Good Old Days
    https://www.populationeducation.org/node/993
  - School Days
    https://www.populationeducation.org/node/1086

- **Social Studies School Service** publishes simulations for all subject areas. See especially those co-published with Buck Institute for Education. Select “Simulations” under the search menu for media,
http://socialstudies.com

- **The World Peace Game** simulation gives players the opportunity to explore the connectedness of the global community with the goal of working together as “nation teams” to achieve global prosperity. It is designed to be played by groups of 30-35 students ages 9-12.
  - John Hunter’s TED talk, “Teaching with the World Peace Game”
    https://www.ted.com/talks/john_hunter_on_the_world_peace_game
  - The book
    http://www.worldpeacegame.org/the-book
  - The film
    http://www.worldpeacegame.org/the-film/trailer

### Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

**The items in this following section detail what must be submitted for evaluation. To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1 and 3 and a “Yes” for Part 2.**

**Part 1. Overview Questions**
(500-word limit total):

- What were your goals and expectations for engaging students in a simulation? How did you select or design a simulation with these aims in mind?
- What did you observe during the simulation? Please describe your experience as the facilitator and what you noticed about how students engaged in the simulation.
  - **Passing**: The educator provides a thorough and thoughtful rationale for the simulation and a detailed description of significant observations made during the simulation.

**Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts**
Please submit a video or audio recording of students participating in the reflective debrief after the simulation (maximum length: three minutes) OR written reflections from three to five different students that demonstrate
how your implementation of the simulation helped students develop greater empathy (maximum length: three pages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Yes”</th>
<th>“Almost”</th>
<th>“Not Yet”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student reflections clearly and consistently demonstrate that the educator is able to successfully implement simulations that result in helping students develop greater empathy. Student reflections include strong evidence of students taking on the perspectives of others; understanding the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others; and/or valuing the diverse perspectives of others.</td>
<td>Student reflections demonstrate that the educator is able to implement simulations, but there is not enough evidence to support whether students develop greater empathy. Student reflections include limited evidence of students taking on the perspectives of others; understanding the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others; and/or valuing the diverse perspectives of others.</td>
<td>Student reflections do not yet provide the evidence needed to demonstrate that the educator is able to implement simulations that result in helping students develop greater empathy. Student reflections include little or no evidence of students taking on the perspectives of others; understanding the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others; and/or valuing the diverse perspectives of others.</td>
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**Part 3. Reflection**

(750-word limit total):

- What did you learn during the simulation? Please consider both your experiences as the facilitator and your observations of the students as they engaged in the simulation.
- What did you learn from the reflective debrief? Please consider what the students said in the debrief conversation and what they wrote in their personal reflections.
- Based on these learnings, what will you do the next time you select/create and facilitate a simulation? Please consider things you did that were successful, reflecting on what you will do again, as well as things you will do differently next time.
  - **Passing:** The educator provides a thorough and thoughtful reflection that addresses all three questions in detail, and clearly and consistently demonstrates an understanding of how to implement simulations that help students develop greater empathy.