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Sandra M. Fowler¹
and Margaret D. Pusch²

Abstract

Intercultural simulations are instructional activities that engage and challenge participants with experiences integral to encounters between people of more than one cultural group. Simulations designed specifically to support intercultural encounters have been in use since the 1970s. This article examines the conceptual bases for intercultural simulation games, their history, contexts in which they are being or have been used, their efficacy, and the current situation for intercultural simulation games. The article concludes with a look at future directions, which will rely on technological advances and the creative work of promising young interculturalists.

Keywords

BAFA BAFA, BARNGA, computer-based intercultural training, cross-cultural training, culture, diversity, ECOTONOS, intercultural competence, intercultural encounters, intercultural simulation games

Simulations are designed to provide opportunities to practice some set of skills or to become adept at dealing with situations that will occur in the future. Intercultural simulations do not differ from this norm. Intercultural simulation games can be defined as instructional activities that engage and challenge participants with certain experiences integral to encounters between people of more than one cultural group. The cultures can be national, ethnic, occupational, gender, racial, or any other groups that can be construed as cultures because they are inherently different due to values, norms, behavior patterns, and the like. Intercultural simulation games are designed and conducted to develop skills and inoculate participants for future experience in a different

¹La Jolla, CA, USA

²Intercultural Communication Institute & SIETAR-USA, Portland, OR, USA

Corresponding Author:

Sandra M. Fowler, 8276 Caminito Maritimo, La Jolla, CA 92037-2203, USA
Email: sfowler@apa.org

or unknown cultural environment. Thus, there is an emphasis on the general characteristics of culture, the process of interacting with those who are culturally different, and the values and beliefs that may affect behavior.

The focus of this article is intercultural, not international, simulation games. Crookall (2003) describes the field of international relations as vast and indeed it is. In Crookall's schema, intercultural communication and cross-cultural exchange are topics placed under the umbrella of international relations in the company of other topics such as climate change, security, peace, and arms proliferation. The core of any intercultural simulation game is culture and one could argue that all the issues included in Crookall's list have very basic cultural elements; they do not stand alone without the influence of culture. However, debating that is not the task of this article.

Additionally, the focus in this article is on simulation games, not games without simulation or simulations without any gaming aspects. The definition of games typically includes the concept of winning versus losing but in the intercultural realm, it is not whether you win or lose but *how* you play the game. Intercultural simulation game elements tend to be obstacles for achieving goals such as constraints on time, information, and language. Certainly within intercultural simulations there are elements of winning by achieving more points or gaining more "goods" when simulating competitiveness and individualism. Intercultural trainers are fond of using experiential exercises and activities but in most instances those activities cannot be classified as simulation games without stretching the definition of simulation game beyond reason.

The main focus in this article is on published simulation games. There are quite a few intercultural simulations and games being used today that are not yet published and therefore, not available to trainers around the globe. Interesting and useful as they are, their lack of availability makes them ineligible candidates for this article.

Another group of simulation games that do not fall within the focus of this article are the many games that could be used with multicultural groups and debriefed for some cultural learning simply because participants from different cultures view the world, behave, and can be expected to play differently. These games were not designed as intercultural simulation games and their central foci are topics such as negotiation, foreign diplomacy, or migration. So considering only intercultural simulation games designed specifically for intercultural training narrows the field and makes it manageable. Otherwise almost any experiential activity used for training might be considered an intercultural simulation game, and that is not our intent.

Conceptual Bases for Intercultural Simulation Games

Most intercultural simulation games provide preconstructed cultures with rules and reward and punishment systems (though rarely very severe), styles of interacting in social and sometimes work situations, and, perhaps, even a language. Often the cultures are distinctly individualistic and competitive contrasted with collective and collaborative, which allows for an exploration of how these two fundamental cultural orientations

play out in a group and cause difficulty when people move into the “other” cultural setting. Communicative style may also be prescribed by the game designers, especially being direct or indirect in speaking with others. How people achieve their goals—either by being primarily oriented toward completing tasks and achievement or nurturing relationships—is another focus, and getting the work done through those relationships is often included in the simulation. It is not that either group fails to have important aspects of the other’s behavior in their own culture, but that the emphasis is in different places and demonstrated in contrasting patterns of behavior. Concern for time often emerges in the contrasting cultures and is expressed as moving directly toward established goals, with time as the essence, versus allowing things to evolve as relationships are developed. Use of space is included with directions for how close people can stand; contact is prescribed by indicating how much they should or should not touch, and eye contact is enforced or not. These and other subtle and contrasting dynamics of interpersonal behavior define how people function in each culture.

The goal of helping people create the capacity to deal with a new culture sounds simple but is, in fact, a very complex process. Therefore, while simulations of cross-cultural interaction, as noted above, include how people deal with the use of space, verbal and nonverbal communication, values, social structures, time consciousness, and many other aspects of cultural differences, there is also an element of emotional reactions. The Intensity Factors of intercultural contact, as defined by Paige (1994) are present to some degree although they cannot be totally replicated. Paige identifies 10 cultural differences:

- ethnocentrism
- language
- cultural immersion
- cultural isolation
- prior intercultural experience
- expectations
- visibility/invisibility
- status
- power
- control

Many of these emerge in the simulations, some with greater impact than others. However, it is not possible to provide complete cultural immersion or isolate individuals from their own culture group or the environment in which the simulation is conducted. The visibility level of those from the other simulated culture is high, but other conditions that Paige addresses, such as hiding one’s sexual orientation, rarely arise in the constructed cultures. The other intensity factors can, and usually are, part of the experience. Thus, the ability to respond appropriately when visiting the “other” culture and the feelings that emerge are prime topics for discussion. The most surprising outcome of the simulation experience is the degree to which people come to

identify with the simulated culture and how long they persist in protecting their rules and patterns. Often artifacts (pins, cards, etc.) are used and there have been times when people just could not relinquish these identifying items for a long period of time, in one case, several weeks.

BAFA BAFA™ (registered trademark of Simulation Training Systems; current version: Shirts, 1995; the original version was published in 1974; see explanation later in this article), arguably the first widely used simulation of this genre, places participants in two distinctly different cultures and creates a special language for one to increase the disorientation of moving into a new culture after becoming acculturated to the first one. Participants are restricted to the rules and structure of their culture and adopt them as their own with surprising speed, thus having considerable difficulty when visiting the other and quickly developing attitudes that were prejudicial and negative. They are really happy to “go home” and not particularly anxious to engage with those who were different. The debriefing focuses on entry strategies, that is, developing a consciousness about what participants did when entering the other culture and what they could do better. The debriefing also addresses what attitudes emerged and how they developed, and the skills that would make this a more constructive and satisfying interaction—in other words, the development of intercultural competence. The two cultures demonstrated a number of cultural factors and the most salient is the difference between high context and low context cultures. The intensity of being in a high context or more relational culture compared with functioning in a low context or more task-oriented culture is exaggerated, to be sure, but allows participants to learn this very useful concept with all the ramifications of being in each kind of social environment.

The use of BAFA BAFA is limited by two conditions: the length of time it takes to conduct and the imposed characteristics of the cultures. Thus, many simulations were created that took less time to produce similar results. Indeed in 1992, Shirts developed a version of BAFA BAFA for corporations that takes much less time to prepare and run than the school and charity version that more closely resembles the original. Even though the issue of time plagues some trainers, others do not see this as a problem. Regarding this issue, Shirts contends,

First of all, not all people are concerned about time. Often we have people who are running workshops who are delighted to have an experience that takes the whole morning. Their comments are along the line of “the simulation is much more valuable than what we would be doing if we weren’t interacting in a simulation, i.e., death by power point.” Second, I think there are benefits to having a longer time. It’s like a play in three acts, the first two acts are necessary to create the level of anticipation, history and level of anxiety for the third act to have power. I believe there’s a demand and need for all types of simulations including short, punchy simulations. I just don’t agree that the length of the simulation is an absolute barrier (R. G. Shirts, personal communication, March 2, 2009).

The conclusion seems clear: Whether time is a factor depends on the trainer, client, and context.

The second constraint regarding BAFABA's two cultures are the imposed characteristics that people have complained are artificial, stereotypical, or confusing. These remain an issue for some trainers. Restrictions are rarely placed on changing the rules or assisting others to "fit in," but it is rare that participants think to challenge the fundamental nature of the rules. Encouraging groups to maintain their respective cultures and not to reveal the rules reinforces this tendency. This is a lesson in the strong impact of cultural orientations and not only how hard it is to challenge cultural norms or to change how the culture is organized, but how rarely anyone is inclined to do so. Trainers have learned that this can be handled in the debriefing as it has real world analogs.

This is also evident in Sivasailam Thiagarajan's BARNGA (Steinwachs, 1995), a card game tournament in which each table starts with different rules. Even when it becomes apparent that newcomers to a table are not playing the exact same game, players tend to cling to their own rules, convinced the others are in error. Players at some tables do attempt to make it easier for visitors by accommodating to their rules while others staunchly maintain and defend their original rules. The cultural connotations of these behaviors become clear in the debriefing.

As time went on, there was an attempt to add additional learning goals by creating simulations that had more complex options. ECOTONOS (Saphiere, 1995) was a major step in this direction by having a set of culture cards that could be selected to produce a variety of cultural options and asking participants to create a myth that explained how the culture came to be, how values and beliefs evolved, and the manner in which the set of characteristics supported the needs of the group to survive and live with a degree of harmony. After the cultures are created and practiced, they are asked to work on a problem which can be a case study or physical task.

Participants are then placed in multicultural groups and instructed to continue making decisions required to deal with the dilemma they were assigned. The groups are not composed simply of equal numbers from each culture but structured to produce three distinctive multicultural compositions: majority/minority, equal numbers of only two culture groups, and a more complex mix of people from each culture. The participants bring their own way of dealing with decision making as well as all their new cultural norms to the process of working on a situation that could occur in real life. Often the trainer creates a case that directly addresses some issue in the participants' work or living environment. Personality plays a role as people are different even within culture groups but do share strong preferences for particular kinds of behavior, values, and process. The game focuses on:

1. how to achieve resolution when there are many ways to approach and solve the problem
2. the impact of culture on any situation
3. the need to reach solutions using the collective intelligence in a diverse group

The challenge of ECOTONOS is the array of views and the tendency to impose one's own way of dealing with conflict and decision-making. All this leads to exploring the expectations, group process, and the inherent contradictions that may exist in any

culture. Ultimately, the groups are asked to diagram their communication patterns, sharing them with the other groups, and exploring how they might work in a more constructive manner. The presentations are often very creative and always revealing.

Few subsequent simulations have delivered as complex a process as ECOTONOS and many have taken different approaches to getting at the actual process of functioning in multicultural environments with the kind of real issues that are apt to emerge. No matter how they are constructed, the basic concept behind these simulations is learning to deal with the issues of culture-specific identity, cross-cultural comparisons, and intercultural interaction. The intended outcome is understanding the “action chains” (referring to established, culturally appropriate, sequential behaviors; Hall, 1966) that tend to exist within cultures, the diversity that can exist within a given culture, and the development of intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence is a major theme in the field of intercultural communication. How interaction occurs between people who are culturally different and in what ways it can be better is the goal of all the work in the field. Thus, a great deal of effort has gone into identifying what is constructive behavior, the attitudes that are essential to building greater understanding and good relationships, and the manner in which skill can be developed. Simulations are oriented to that skill building but also emphasizing what is referred to as the “heart set” or attitudes and intentions that are brought to the interaction. There is also attention to the “head set” or knowledge that is required, but the greatest emphasis is on the “hand set” skills. For much of the history of the field, long lists of skills and attitudes were developed and used as the standard against which to compare one’s own behavior. One widely used list appeared in *The Survival Kit for Overseas Living* (Kohls, 1984). Deardorff (2006) tested and retested the intercultural competency traits that a group of recognized experts in the field of intercultural communication selected and then determined where agreement among them occurred. She created a model that helps approach all these skills and attitudes with an emphasis on the *process* of becoming competent rather than developing a more refined check-list of attributes against which one can measure one’s competencies. All of the elements mentioned here are in her model. She also identifies internal and external outcomes from the experience of intercultural interaction. In a way, her model (Figure 1) graphically shows what the intentions of an intercultural simulation are: to produce change on all of these levels and, in addition, to identify what is brought to the experience and how individuals can become more adept at dealing with differences. In the end, this is why intercultural simulations were created and continue to be used in some form.

Background

Early Development

In its earliest years as a recognized endeavor, cross-cultural training consisted primarily of lectures, maps, reading, and some film. This style of training became known as

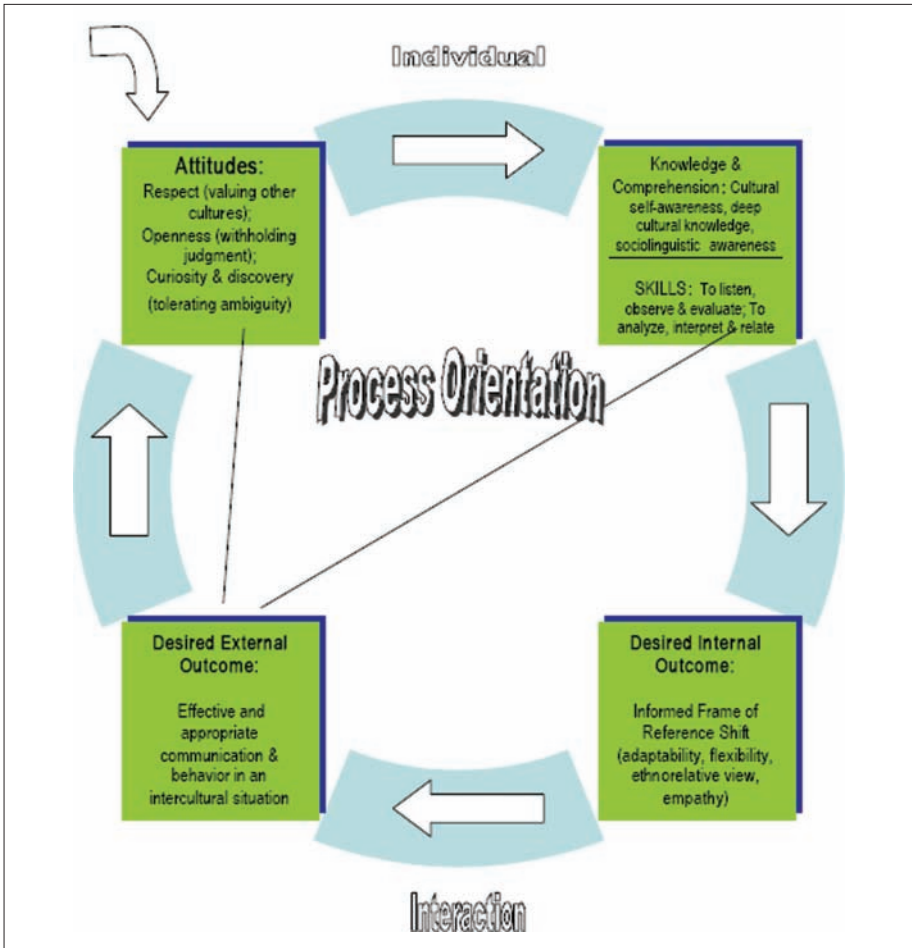


Figure 1. Process model of intercultural competence

Source: Deardorff (2006). Reprinted with permission.

the university model and was the basis for predeparture briefing and orientation. In the decade of the 1960s, cross-cultural trainers looked to human relations training to incorporate attitudes, values, and feelings into their training programs. Although the best approach for cross-cultural training (cognitive vs. human relations or sensitivity training) was hotly debated, by the close of the 20th century, trainers had “found ways to integrate effectively cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning to the benefit of participants in intercultural training programs” (Fowler & Mumford, 1995, p. xiii).

This evolved form of cross-cultural training can be called cross-cultural education.

Cross-cultural education is based on the assumption that additional knowledge and skills must be added to the trainee's repertoire in order for him/her to function effectively in a foreign culture. The content of these training efforts is not as prescriptive as that provided by cross-cultural orientation efforts and tends to focus on knowledge and skills that are considered to be cross-situationally applicable to the sojourn experience (Hammer & Fowler, n.d., p. 4).

Because trainees were expected to function in an unfamiliar environment, simulation provided a method for practice in such early simulation games as THE ALBATROSS and BAFA BAFA. Game elements, which often are the hooks that engaged the participants, also offered the opportunity to try out and practice the interaction skills they learned in the classroom. In addition, trainees were expected to effectively interact based on their understanding of self and others.

Although not adopted with open arms by all cross-cultural (later called intercultural) trainers, many had discovered the power of simulation games to give participants an opportunity to experience aspects of encountering and communicating in a culture different from their own. Early evidence of simulation games being used for intercultural training in the United States dates back to the 1970s with the publication of the first edition of *Beyond Experience*, which chronicled the experiential approach to cross-cultural education used by the Experiment in International Living (later renamed World Learning, Inc.). For many years, mimeographed copies of the exercises were provided when individuals requested them from the Experiment so the publication of this book was welcomed and it is an early example of the production of materials for experiential learning in the field. In 1977, Christie wrote, "A long-held principle at The Experiment is the respect for exercises, games, or simulations as effective educational techniques . . ." (Christie, 1977/1993, p. 57). One of the first widely known simulation games used for cross-cultural training was ALBATROSS (Gochenour, 1993a, 1993b), but the most important contribution from the Experiment was to widely share how they used experiential methods as an approach to learning about intercultural interaction.

The early 1970s also saw the development of BAFA BAFA by R. Garry Shirts for the U.S. Navy. The Navy had contracted with Shirts for a simulation that they could use to select uniformed personnel for overseas assignments. However, they recognized the training potential for BAFA BAFA and abandoned using it as a selection device. Published in 1974, this classic simulation has been used globally to help teach "that what seems irrational, contradictory, or unimportant to us in our culture may seem rational, consistent, and terribly important to a person from another culture" (Shirts, 1995, p. 94). Around 1980, Shirts developed RAFA RAFA, which simplified the rules of BAFA BAFA, for use by elementary and middle school teachers to introduce the idea of culture to their young students. The early days of BAFA BAFA exemplify many of the first intercultural simulation games to come on the scene.

When asked for a copy of the game, Shirts would send a copy of the artifacts and instructions. The recipient would then assemble the game. As it became more popular, Shirts was receiving more requests than he could easily fill, but his government contract prohibited him from publishing the game for a certain time period. As soon as he could, he published this intercultural game as he had his earlier game, STARPOWER (1969), which deals with issues around economic disparity and privilege.

Another popular cross-cultural game, BARNGA, started the same way. Developed by Sivasailam Thiagarajan in the early 1980s, individual copies of instructions for assembling and conducting the simulation were sent to trainers he knew. It was several years before Barbara Steinwachs developed the BARNGA manual, which was first published by the Intercultural Press in 1990 and is now available in its 25th anniversary edition (Thiagarajan, 2006). The beautifully packaged game instructions and artifacts that are now available for many intercultural simulation games make it somewhat difficult to remember how primitive some of the games were when they first appeared.

From the beginning of these early simulation games, many others such as DIVERSOPHY (Simons, 1993) and ECOTONOS have appeared along the way. While not all of them have achieved such wide use as BAFABA, many of them sparked ideas for other games or more streamlined exercises and activities that were used by trainers throughout the world. DIVERSOPHY has a version that can be played on Second Life, which may be the wave of the future. We would venture to say that there is not a trainer alive who has never tweaked a game or exercise. Simulation games, like any other training method, need to be customized to the needs of the client, the skills of the trainer, and the goals of the training program.

Contexts for Using Intercultural Simulation Games

To be effective, simulation games used for instructional purposes must fit the context and culture of the sponsoring organization and its objectives. Early users of simulation games tended to be trainers of Foreign Service officers and youth exchange programs such as the American Field Service and Youth for Understanding. About the same time, the U.S. Peace Corps, officially founded in 1961, began training volunteers for overseas placements. The training designers ultimately recognized the need to train the whole person, not just increase their intellectual knowledge of the destination country. Similar training programs in various parts of the world gradually began using simulation games as well.

The corporate sector was much slower in recognizing the need for intercultural training—much less the usefulness of simulation games. By the time the business community was convinced that intercultural training could be an advantage to the bottom line, intercultural trainers were committed to experiential training that often included simulation games.

In assessing the state of the art of simulation games used in cross-cultural training, it is useful to examine a few of the agencies and organizations for whom cultural training is an essential component of getting the job done and who have at least in the past, used simulation games in their training repertoire.

The U.S. Peace Corps. From its founding in 1961 to 1968, Peace Corps conducted training on college campuses within the United States and training camps in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. A traditional university model combined with hard physical fitness training characterized the program design at that time. In the 1970s and 1980s, the training was moved to predeparture training centers created within the United States for part of the training followed by in-country programs. The emphasis was on both academic and experiential training and it was during this time that simulation games came into more prominent use while trainees were in the United States. Once in-country, host national, and American training staff made use of daily encounters between volunteers and their new environment to explore cultural issues. It was not until 1996 that the “first cross-cultural specialist position was created at the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. to provide a framework and institutionalize cross-cultural training” (Bennhold-Samaan, 2004, p. 369).

When all training was moved in-country or to a nearby country, there was less need to use simulations with the trainees. Currently, the Peace Corps is primarily using a community-based training model, but in some locations, a mixture of center- and community-based training continues. Some of the cross-cultural portion of the training is based on the work of Craig Storti and Laurette Bennhohld-Samaan (1997, 1999), which includes many experiential exercises but no simulation games per se. On the other hand, the U.S.-based training for overseas staff includes a day-long simulation called ZOMBA, which introduces the staff to the kinds of issues they will face. It is not a competitive game but includes game elements such as constraints based on real-world situations. Another simulation with some game elements developed by Peace Corps is WANZUZU, which is played online. It was designed to interest young people in Peace Corps issues with the idea that it might lead to future service. The well-being of the Wanzuzu community is affected by the choices the player selects making it quite game-like.

Foreign Service. The U.S. State Department was totally dependent on the area studies model for its preparation of Foreign Service Officers until Edward T. Hall accepted a job at the Foreign Service Institute in the 1950s. The area studies model is a very academic approach to teaching about the countries of the world. Hall knew that culture is the “keystone in human civilization’s arch and is the medium through which all of life’s events must flow” (Hall, 1976, p. 14). He knew at the time that he had a new and vital approach to human communication and wanted to do something with that. He joined forces with the linguists, but ran headlong into the entrenched bureaucracy of the government. As he put it, “the State Department remained blind to these new dimensions of foreign affairs and the need for cultural know-how at the grass roots” and Hall felt that such skills were a mandatory tool in the kit of the Foreign Service officers and aid technicians.

Hall struggled to bring culture to the core of the Foreign Service Institute training, but it was not until the Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) was founded in 1977 that cross-cultural experiential training gained a real foothold. During the 1980s, both BARNGA and BAFA BAFA were used in the pre-departure training for State

Department employees and family members at the OBC. Currently, the OBC has become a branch of the Transition Center, which includes preparation for overseas assignments, safety training, and preparation for retirement. Their use of experiential training includes simulations resembling fire drills used for special safety training for children going to overseas posts and as they call it, the Kahn Exercise (also known as the Contrast Culture Exercise, Stewart, 1995) in the Communication Across Cultures course.

Education. Cross-cultural simulation games have been used in the United States largely for college students enrolled in anthropology courses, communication courses, and occasionally other subjects. Simulation games are not as widely used in the European classrooms because of the theoretical emphasis in Europe versus the practical orientation in America (S. Vonsild, personal communication, June 26, 2009). Simulation games have also been used in the United States for predeparture training of students and faculty involved in foreign exchange programs. According to Garry Shirts, his simulation games (BAFA BAFA in particular) are selling well to universities and colleges (personal communication, November 2008).

Some simulation exercises have been used for programs designed for returning students as well. Reentry training has not received quite the same degree of attention as predeparture training, however. Simulation games have also been used to prepare staff and, occasionally, faculty for both the study abroad experience and to more effectively welcome and work with foreign students coming to their institutions. In a situation devoted to learning intercultural theory and practice, such as the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication held each year in Portland, OR, simulations can be more readily used but, more important, can be introduced as a tool for education and training to participants who fan out across the world and employ what they have learned to their work situation in their home country. For example, one workshop, contrary to the usual practice, begins with a simulation originally called PLAYEROS AND WIZARDOS but currently named ROCKETS AND SPARKLERS (Stringer & Cassidy, 2003, pp. 161-165), which resembles other intercultural simulations in that it sets up two cultures but is designed to be played in less than a half-hour with more time devoted to analysis and debriefing. Throughout the remainder of the one-week workshop, the facilitators effectively draw on and refer back to that experience as participants work at connecting what is being learned in this admittedly rarified environment to their everyday world.

Precollegiate education uses simulations in various courses. Curriculum development outreach centers such as the Stanford Programs on Intercultural and Cross-cultural Education (SPICE; <http://spice.stanford.edu>) provide various simulations such as *Heelotia: A Cross-Cultural Simulation and Living in a Global Age*, which introduce curriculum issues (such as the energy crisis) through simulation. The field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) uses simulations and other activities to explore how language, culture, and intercultural work belong together (Fantini, 1997).

Medicine. One might think that medicine would be a field where cross-cultural training would be welcomed because medical teams are increasingly made up

of personnel from a variety of cultures and the patient population is very diverse. In addition, medical professionals are accustomed to simulations in their training, for example learning diagnosis with actors in the role of patients. However, to our knowledge, cross-cultural simulation games are not in widespread use in medical and nursing schools. In fact, the few that do use them are the exception. The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is one of the exceptions. BAFA BAFA is conducted the first day of classes for all incoming first-year medical students in the course: Human Context in Health Care. The course director, Simon Auster, MD, has customized the introduction and debriefing of the game for the medical context, but the game itself is run as it was designed by Garry Shirts. Observations by the students from playing the game parallel the insights reported by participants under other circumstances and because of the customizing for the medical context, their understanding of the relevance of the insights for their future as physicians is notable.

Business. Although the corporate sector was slow to accept cross-cultural training as essential to their ability to conduct business internationally, this is now one of the most active venues for intercultural trainers. Simulation games are definitely on the list of choices for the corporate sector. As reported in *Training* (Weinstein, 2008), “the question isn’t whether or not to use a game or simulation to train, but which to choose. Fortunately, the experts say this is a permanent trend with ever-expanding options” (p. 40). The issue corporations face is finding simulation games having direct or embedded application to the real world of the participants. Job-relevant simulation games obviate the need for what might be called the *Big Leap*. It has been pointed out that when trainers are skilled facilitators, they can help participants make the leap from seemingly unrelated training exercises to whatever they are doing. Because that level of skill does not exist in all trainers, game designers have had to develop simulations that are directly tied to the business of the learners. Then participants can immediately implement new ways of accomplishing tasks based on what worked in the simulation. Intercultural training is used by businesses for preparing employees and families for overseas living and working, for mergers, joint-venture projects, reentry training, and also for working in an increasingly multicultural environment. Much of the corporate sector training is also part of the leadership pipeline, which includes practicing leadership in a more globalized environment. ECOTONOS was primarily created for use in corporations and others have been designed for specific corporate environments. An example of a game designed for a specific corporation is TTOIR-RAM, designed by Steinwachs and Fowler for training Marriott Hotel personnel, which is not published and therefore not generally available.

While preparing to write this article, we spoke to many corporate trainers, some of whom use full-fledged intercultural simulation games but most do not. Some trainers reported that they like using BAFA BAFA because everything comes in a neat package and 3 hours is not an issue. However, others cited the issue of time restrictions as the greatest barrier to their use in training programs. Every trainer we spoke with uses some form of experiential training, mostly in the form of short exercises and activities. For example, Mike Tucker of Tucker Associates said that he formerly used BAFA

BAFA but no longer because the training for high-level executives has become more like coaching. These executives need to get at the issues quickly—more quickly than most simulation games can provide.

Diversity training. Another area where cross-cultural simulation games have made an impact is on domestic diversity training in the corporate sector. In the early days of diversity training, the key objective was awareness. BAFA BAFA, good at producing awareness of difference and the impact of difference on communication, was used extensively. At this point, however, diversity trainers reported that awareness is not enough and indeed, a second phase of diversity training worked toward creating an environment of inclusion.

In the current phase of diversity training, the goal is often active and full engagement so that diversity issues do not form a barrier to improving the bottom line and enriching the workplace. Using a simulation game that prepares people to go into a multicultural environment does not work because the workers are already there. Thus, one cross-cultural simulation game that is being used for corporate diversity training is BARNGA. Its learning applies to such corporate issues as reactions to change, corporate culture, and understanding the role of rules in the organization. Another game being used by some diversity trainers is MINORIA-MAJORIA (Kohls & Knight, 1994). It has been available for a long time and one trainer said she likes that it is less structured, more open ended and fluid than other simulation games. She can use it anywhere and go to local markets to buy the artifacts, making it highly relevant to the participants.

Other contexts. Cross-cultural simulation games are not limited to the above examples. They have been used for training with, among others, religious missionaries, refugee workers, military officers, and clinical psychologists. For many years, the U.S. Navy used BAFA BAFA for intercultural training at its Human Resource Management Centers. Those centers were discontinued 20 years ago and some of the intercultural training was moved to the Family Support Centers although none are currently doing cross-cultural training using simulation games. Some of the military academies are using BAFA BAFA as part of their coursework for training military officers.

Efficacy

What evidence exists that cross-cultural simulation games do what they purport to do? Unfortunately most of the evidence is anecdotal. However, Hays (2005) examined the effectiveness of instructional games with a review of the simulation game literature and concluded that while there are many articles describing the use and development of simulation games, there are far fewer on effectiveness. He found many articles on the potential of games but little empirical research and he found many studies had flawed methods, opinions, and a lack of control groups. Hays reviewed 127 games in many categories but cross-cultural or intercultural was not one of them. The categories consisted of areas like math, economics, business, social sciences, and attitudes. The

attitudes category contained the only clearly intercultural game used in the reviewed research: BAFA BAFA. Bredemeier, Bernstein, and Oxman (1982) reported using BAFA BAFA to study attitude change regarding dogmatism and ethnocentrism. Their conclusion was that the simulation game made a statistically significant difference for anthropology students but not for philosophy students. This supported their contention that the context in which a game is conducted will determine its effectiveness.

The Bredemeier et al. study was done in 1982 and there have been precious few empirical studies of cross-cultural simulation games since. Crookall (1995) lists 17 references on evaluation and objectives (p. 157), most of which were published in the 1980s or earlier and none of which looked directly at intercultural simulation games. Druckman (1995) was writing about simulation games in general but could have been focusing on intercultural games when he wrote:

Interactive games are widely used as exercises in educational and training programs. In educational settings, they are often used to facilitate concept learning. In training programs, they are used to contribute to the development of task-related skills. Their popularity in both settings is based mostly on judgments made by participants and developers rather than on carefully designed evaluation studies (p. 184).

Barriers exist to evaluating the effectiveness of cross-cultural simulation games. The criterion problem is one of the main issues. Games must be designed to support specific learning goals related to real job requirements and in cross-cultural training the goal is often intercultural competence or cross-cultural success, both of which are vague concepts that trainers have not defined clearly for their clients. While there are generally recognized intercultural competencies, they must be defined to apply to the context of the learner. A Chinese student needing to know how to live with a family during a semester abroad in the United States needs different knowledge and skills than a German businessman negotiating a joint venture in China and different yet from an American Peace Corps volunteer trying to develop a clean water program in rural Chad.

The control group problem looms large in effectiveness research for intercultural simulation games. There is necessarily a dearth of control groups. For example, in the case of predeparture intercultural training, a control group would mean a group sent to a foreign culture without giving them any training at all or with a training program that did not include a major component—a simulation game. It is difficult to convince a client to send some of their personnel overseas with either no training or only partial training, but without a control group, one cannot definitively prove that the experiment (simulation game) made a significant difference.

Simulation games are not meant to be a stand-alone method. They need to be used as part of a larger and carefully constructed training program. Because that is the case, it is difficult if not impossible to parse out the effect of the simulation game from the other methods used during the training. It is great to hear back from trainees that their BAFA

BAFA moments began when they stepped off the plane, but this does not mean that their effectiveness was improved by experiencing the simulation—only that they remember it.

Finally, built-in instructor bias is a factor. Developers of intercultural simulation games—indeed all simulation games—want them to work so they set out to prove that they do. Instructors and trainers who have chosen to use a simulation game have a stake in it working, so they set out to make sure it does. This bias challenges objective evaluation.

All that being said, simulation games remain one of the best ways to afford practice of skills that will be needed in intercultural encounters in a safe haven where a thorough debriefing helps cement the learning. When the object of the training is to improve a person's ability to interact with people whose cultural backgrounds are different, exposure to a slice of those differences is one of the best ways to help people learn—about themselves as well as the other culture. As described in Hays (2005) simulations create a micro-world as they attempt to capture relevant aspects of the real world. Learners can then interact within the micro-world and observe the effects of their interactions. Especially for people facing an overseas assignment but also in home country intercultural or diversity situations, this ability to practice ahead of time creates the opportunity to change behaviors that might be appropriate in one cultural setting into behaviors that have a greater potential for achieving the learner's real-world objectives in a different culture.

Current Situation

A number of intercultural simulation games appeared in the last decade of the 20th century. Some have caught on throughout the world while others remain quite localized. It is reasonable to expect that a simulation game developed in Germany for Germans working with Turkish guest workers would not necessarily be appropriate for use in other countries. Intercultural games developed in Asia tend to have differing perspectives from those developed in the Western hemisphere. Intercultural simulation games developed in one region of the world need to be modified on export so that all aspects of the game from the introduction to the debriefing fit the situation and culture in which they are used.

What are some of the newer games? Although BARNGA had been distributed by Thiagarajan since the mid-1980s, the training manual first appeared in 1990, spreading the use of that game over the globe. Its instructions were published in both Spanish and French and many trainers have translated the rules of the game into other languages as needed. RANDOMIA BALLOON FACTORY, a management game for working across the cultural divide developed by Grove and Hollowell and reviewed in *Simulation & Gaming* (Fowler, 2002) is available from the Intercultural Press. *Simulation & Gaming* is another source for some intercultural simulation games, such as CALDER CONNECTIONS (Fowler, 2003, pp. 292-297).

In the area of diversity, DIVERSOPHY, a board game produced by George Simons that teaches basic diversity concepts, appeared in the 1990s. Saphiere's ECOTONOS

was first published in 1993 and the newly updated and revised version released in 2009. The multicultural group task at the end of this game is a vivid lesson in multicultural problem solving making it useful for audiences concerned with seeking solutions that prevent power imbalances and improving team productivity. Also available from Intercultural Press, *AN ALIEN AMONG US* by Richard Powers (1999) is a diversity game dealing with acceptance and cultural differences.

Language games are often used in intercultural training programs. *PIGLISH*, developed by Hartley and Lapinsky (1999) for Youth For Understanding, is a game that helps both teachers and learners develop some perspective on the challenges inherent in the process of language learning. A more recent game, *REDUNDANCIA*, published by Nipporica Associates (<http://culturaldetective.com/relatedproducts>), quickly captures the difficulty of speaking a language non-fluently and the self-consciousness that can accompany that process. The main purposes of *REDUNDANCIA* are building empathy for nonfluent speakers and enabling people to practice improving communicative competence across language barriers. It can also be useful for exploring power issues (D. Saphiere, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

One new development in the intercultural field that needs mentioning is the highly successful *CULTURAL DETECTIVE* series created initially by Dianne Saphiere and continuing to develop collaboratively with, currently, 120 authors around the world. This approach to culture learning focuses on values and their impact on behavior for very specific cultures but is based on a core culture-general process that produces insight into one's own cultural orientation and the process of overcoming distrust. The *CULTURAL DETECTIVE* (<http://www.cdireality.com>) is hard to classify since it is participative and experiential but neither a true simulation nor a single game. Perhaps it would best be described as a cognitive exercise. However, it does include games and activities that can be used online. A total of 53 culture-specific packages have been created that range from the Arab Gulf to West Africa and the rest of the world in between, and include a series of packages on such topics as global business ethics, gender, generational harmony, spiritual tradition, and reentry with more are in development, including global teamwork.

The above is hardly an exhaustive list, so the games are out there, but what are trainers using? Typically they are using an eclectic mix of training methods. For example, in the area of diversity, one diversity trainer reported that she uses *CULTURAL DETECTIVE* in combination with role plays, case studies, survival exercises, and self assessments to produce training programs for her clients. She also likes the game *MINORIA-MAJORIA*, developed by Robert Kohls and John Knight (1994), and she uses that regularly.

When trainers are using simulation games, they seem to be mostly modifying existing games to meet their needs or combining the strategies of several games. For instance, Marlo Goldstein (personal communication, 2008) reports that she uses a simulation game that she developed based on two made-up, basically opposing type cultures called "Blasburg" and "Kalamastan." Sometimes people from these countries are meeting for business, for educational exchange, or for a reason that fits the context

of the organization in which the training is being conducted. Each group is given a cultural role to learn, they have 10 to 15 minutes to prepare with the group members. Then they come together for a “mixer” (the purpose of which is defined by the context of the organization) for 15 minutes. She has used this simulation game at the beginning of a cross-cultural communication module as an awareness building piece and refers back to the simulation throughout the rest of the training. She reported that she uses this simulation only when she has 7 hours or more with a group.

A trainer who often works with mixed groups of Americans and Chinese reported using a variety of games and exercises when she has a large group but only rarely with a small group. One successful game challenges participants to get a marble to go along a pipe made up of many pieces, each piece held by an individual. This is an example of a game but not a simulation as defined at the beginning of this article. Even though the debriefing on how the teams developed and worked together is related to their work world, the task does not really simulate a model or slice of any part of their real world. Another trainer uses a tinker toy exercise in which teams in separate rooms must re-create a structure designed by the facilitator. This exercise has some game characteristics such as rules allowing only certain people to see the model structure, that prevent some from not being able to touch their structure, and communication barriers that prescribe who can talk with whom. Other exercises currently being used in the corporate sector resemble the exercises Draw a House and Cultural Encounter by Pedersen (1999).

An intercultural trainer in Japan reported that she uses simulation games with undergraduates at two Japanese universities as part of their coursework and as training prior to Australian and Singapore study tours in addition to training at jobseeker international career seminars. The simulation games she uses are adaptations or original designs based on the work of interculturalists such as Fons Trompenaars and Stella Ting-Toomey.

Educators often are not faced with the same constraints that seem to affect corporate trainers so when they have a 3-hour class, they can use simulations such as BAFA BAFA, which take the full 3 hours to run and debrief. When 3 hours are not available, teachers and professors turn to BARNGA or shorter games of their own design that can be run and debriefed in under an hour. The need for relevancy underscored by the Bredemeier et al. (1982) study, means the appropriate place for intercultural simulation games is in intercultural communication classes, intercultural social sciences courses such as cultural anthropology, and any campus situation where intercultural communication is paramount. A European trainer cautions that the players are changing. For example, many university students in Europe are becoming more interculturally experienced through exchange programs or taking a year to travel and work abroad, so they find games like BAFA BAFA too elementary. Educators need to find more sophisticated intercultural simulations for their students. This is happening in the business world as well.

ROCKETS AND SPARKLERS (formerly PLAYEROS AND WIZARDOS) was developed for use in classrooms that included many students who are the first

generation in their families to attend college and who come from largely working class neighborhoods. Using the usual pattern of creating two cultures, it really emphasizes the difference between people focused on individual achievement and those who are more collective and remain committed to family and community.

Another educator's favorite simulation game is the EMPEROR'S POT (Batchelder, 1996). She closed a 2-day training event for a number of years at a medical research university with that simulation game. That particular university was home to researchers from all over the world, but mostly Mainland China and India. She also used it in a graduate level multicultural education course largely populated by ESL students or language teachers. It helped the teachers communicate with students and parents. Nearly everyone who had participated in this exercise liked the game and thought it was useful and accurate but one behavioral science professor felt that the East and West cultures were stereotypical and that the game was structured so that no matter what you did, you could not win.

Typically any intercultural simulation game, such as the EMPEROR'S POT, needs to be grounded in an intercultural context. An appropriate lecture on culture, norms, values, stereotyping, communication styles, or whatever aspect of intercultural communication that is relevant to the course material is not only valuable prior to conducting the simulation but as a follow up to the debriefing.

Are there any new intercultural simulation games on the horizon? A simulation game based on the multicultural issues of the international space station has been accepted for publication, and will likely appear in late 2009 or early 2010. This game, based on research, presents the intercultural communication challenges faced by the Russians, Americans, Japanese, and Europeans working together on the space program.

Because intercultural trainers are such a creative group, it is likely that other games are germinating, but getting them published and distributed widely is not easy, nor is it usually rapid. Users of intercultural games are eager to try something new, but they are very particular about what will work with their clients or students and what will not. Thus, intercultural trainers tend to create some version of those simulations on the market to address the issues that have emerged in their particular client group and, when we asked a large group of trainers, discovered that there are far more "home" crafted simulations than we anticipated. These are often shared at conferences for associations such as the Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR), the North American Simulation and Gaming Association (NASAGA), and the International Simulation Game Association (ISAGA) but continue to be "fugitive" materials rather than widely available ones. One theme that we heard more than any other, aside from specificity to a client, is the need for brevity. This may suggest that the orientation toward using time efficiently is dominant, which, interestingly, is a cultural trait in itself.

Future Directions

What does the future hold for intercultural simulation games? Despite a rather cloudy crystal ball, several trends seem to be emerging. In the field of intercultural training,

there is evident movement toward more culture-specific training. If that trend continues, the use of culture-general games such as BAFA BAFA may decrease. Considering the decided trend toward trainers modifying existing games and creating their own exercises, some—and maybe most—trainers will use the basic models of existing games but customize them for specific cultures as well as specific clients. However, the market for culture-general games will remain large because not everyone who uses a simulation game is a professional trainer. There are thousands of Human Resources people, educators, and community organizers, for example, who use BAFA BAFA (Shirts, personal communication, March 2, 2009) who do not see themselves as trainers, *per se*. They are grateful for simulations that meet their goals without a lot of work on their part. Many of these same people and other in-house trainers as well, are not trained interculturalists but use BAFA BAFA and other simulations to stimulate discussions of intercultural issues and concerns such as racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism.

The trend toward computer-based training, which is covered in another article in this 40th anniversary state-of-the-art series will certainly influence how intercultural training is conducted. As reported in a special section on games and simulations in *Training* (Weinstein, 2008),

[T]echnology that just a decade ago mostly was reserved for professionals in fields such as medicine or engineering is so widespread today you're liable to see it anywhere, in more accessible, applicable forms than ever before. (p. 40)

The technology using avatars and Second Life can create situations where, when playing a game, the person is actually doing the activity. In the case of an intercultural simulation, the person is confronted with an actual situation or dilemma they are likely to face. One caveat is that not all workers are comfortable with this yet. One solution for the transition period might be to combine high-tech, online simulations with low-tech, in-person simulation games.

Shirts points out that millions of kids worldwide are playing internet games that take them into different cultures and virtual worlds. These are the workers of the future; they will be very familiar with avatars and the like that may well serve as the basis for future intercultural games. Shirts thinks that eventually there will be holographs of people from different cultures with whom trainees can interact and learn from. He believes there is room for every type of intercultural training and we are just beginning to explore opportunities for online teaching, which will lead to a “whole raft of very powerful cross-cultural simulations and interactions that will be played over the internet in the future” (personal communication, March 2, 2009)

The issue of time constraints in business and government training will continue. The press for time in the private sector is incredible and there is no indication that it will change any time soon. Simulation games will continue to be used in education. It remains to be seen how the economic situation will affect education exchange but predictions are that programs offering students and faculty overseas exchanges will continue at their current level or increase. Indeed some universities and colleges are

now requiring students to go abroad. Also, in Europe universities, governments, and the European Union heavily and increasingly support international student and researcher exchange.

It is troubling that there has been nothing truly new in intercultural games since the turn of the century. The Synthetic Cultures idea by Geert Jan Hofstede, Paul Pedersen, and Geert Hofstede holds promise for future simulation games. The Hofstede set of 10 synthetic cultures, derived from his research, is based on his five dimensions of culture that can be useful as core concepts for intercultural simulations. This was first presented in *Simulation & Gaming* (Hofstede & Pedersen, 1999), and further developed in the book *Exploring culture: Exercises, stories and synthetic cultures* published by Intercultural Press in 2002 (Hofstede, Pedersen, & Hofstede, 2002). The synthetic culture concept merits consideration because of its theoretical value, as is argued by Harry Triandis in the foreword. However, Geert Jan Hofstede wrote, "Synthetic cultures are not themselves a game, but they are a culture-scripting device that can be used in many simulation gaming exercises" (personal electronic communication, August 20, 2008).

In terms of content, the development of new games must wait for new research. For example, the space station simulation mentioned earlier could not have been done prior to the extensive research on which it is based. In terms of structure and process, there has been no new departure for a long time. A number of promising young interculturalists are involved in both research and training, and they can apply their creativity to the issues and develop the games of the future. Will they? We trust that they will.

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Bios

Sandra M. Fowler holds a graduate degree in organizational psychology, specializing in intercultural relations. She served on the Board of Directors for SIETAR-USA and edited its newsletter. Involved with simulation games since 1973 and winner of NASAGA's Ifil-Reynolds Award, she has created games, conducted them, written about them, and taught others how to use them. Contact: sfowler@apa.org

Margaret D. Pusch is a member of the Board of Directors of the Intercultural Communication Institute, Executive Director of SIETAR-USA, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership, a member of the Board of Directors of the Association for International Practical Training, and an active trainer in the United States and Europe. Contact: mdpusch@gmail.com