Teaching resources for Preliminary *Intercultural Communication*

BAFA'BAFA' COCKTAIL PARTY

by Christina Kalinic

Syllabus link:

Social and cultural research methods

- Research methods - qualitative
    - Participant observation

Students will develop knowledge and understanding of the nature of communication through a study of:

- how culture determines the ways individuals encode messages, what mediums they choose for transmitting them, and the ways messages are interpreted

Syllabus outcome:

P3 identifies and describes relationships and interactions within and between social and cultural groups

P8 plans and conducts ethical and social research

Learning Intention:

Students will develop an understanding of cultural relativism and the importance of cross-cultural awareness by participating in a simulation that demonstrates how culture shapes communication, values, and social norms. Through participant observation, students will learn how sociologists and anthropologists use qualitative research methods to interpret behaviour within cultural contexts.

Success Criteria:

- I can describe how values and norms influence social interaction and behaviour.
- I can identify examples of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism in my observations.
- I can explain how participant observation is used as a research method, including its strengths and weaknesses.
- I can reflect on my own reactions and assumptions when interacting with unfamiliar cultural behaviours.

In the BaFa'BaFa' Cocktail Party, students experience how cultural norms and values shape communication- including body language, eye contact, personal space, gestures, and timing in conversation. Each group's "rules" reflect a distinct cultural communication style, showing that what feels polite or respectful in one culture may seem uncomfortable or rude in another.

Through participant observation, students come to understand that:

- **Encoding** (how messages are expressed) varies across cultures- e.g., gestures, tone, or eye contact.
- **Mediums of communication differ-** e.g., verbal versus non-verbal cues.
- **Interpretation** of messages depends on cultural context- misunderstandings arise when people apply their own cultural norms to another group's behaviour.

This directly reinforces the idea that communication is culturally constructed, not universal, and that cultural awareness is essential for accurate interpretation in cross-cultural interactions.

BaFa'BaFa' Cocktail Party

WHAT IS A BaFa'BaFa'?

BaFa'BaFa' is a face-to-face simulation game developed by Dr Garry Shirts in 1974.

The purpose of the BaFa'BaFa' is to improve participant's cross-cultural competence- *interact with a culture where people have different values, different ways of behaving and solving problems.*

PURPOSE:

You have been invited to your school's annual cocktail party hosted by its anthropology and sociology students.

The purpose of this cocktail party is to observe and record your interactions with the group of people you are unfamiliar with.

This is also known as *participant observation!*

Divide the students in your class into TWO even groups (*Group A* and *Group B*).

Give each group their cocktail party rules- *they MUST NOT see the rules of the other group.*

GROUP A's RULES:

- When having a conversation stand shoulder-to-shoulder
- Avoid looking anybody in the face when communicating with them and maintain a neutral face (no smiling)
- Avoid touching anyone and always keep your hands by your sides
- It is rude to talk too quickly- there must be at least a five-second pause between each statement/question/answer
- Shaking your head from side-to-side means 'yes'
- Nodding your head up and down means 'no'
- If one of the above rules is broken, walk away immediately

GROUP B's RULES:

- Stand closely to the person you are talking to
- Maintain regular eye contact throughout a conversation
- It is appropriate to touch the person you are talking to on the shoulder or arm
- Use gestures (facial or hands) when talking and remember to smile
- No need to apologise to a person if you literally "bump into them"
- Shaking your head from side-to-side means 'no'
- Nodding your head up and down means 'yes'

BaFa'BaFa' Cocktail Party

Time for a cocktail party!

Enjoy the party and meet as many people as you can!

POST-COCKTAIL PARTY:

Record your observations:

EYE CONTACT

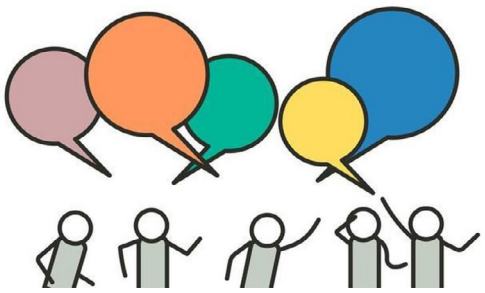
SPEECH PATTERNS

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

BaFa'BaFa' Cocktail Party

Discussion questions:

- *What were your immediate thoughts about the other guests at the cocktail party? Consider their behaviour, attitude, etc.*
- *How did you feel about your behaviour/actions during the cocktail party?*
- *What has this simulation taught you about cultural difference?*



Writing for understanding:

Explain the strengths and weaknesses of conducting participant observation. [4 marks]

Verbs to help you write about strengths		Verbs to help you write about weaknesses	
• Reveals	• Allows	• Limits	• Affects
• Uncovers	• Develops	• Restricts	• Compromises
• Provides	• Emerges	• Hinders	• Reduces
• Enhances	• Stems from	• Biases	• Distorts
• Demonstrates	• Reflects	• Influences	• Undermines
• Enables	• Captures	• Challenges	• Constrains