line and sinker.

For the remainder of class I divide students into small groups to discuss how the video and their experience of the video relates to the entire semester. Though some struggle, most students easily identify countless concepts from the preceding months. Groups then report back to the larger class and share how they connected the video to the course. Topics such as culture, norms, values, ideology, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, racism, prejudice and discrimination, propaganda, social change, and most importantly that they must ALWAYS question the data before believing anything, are common themes. Metaphorical tears of joy wash down my face as a whole semesters worth of light bulbs flash all at once. It’s a great way to end the semester and an experience that many students do not quickly forget.

**Enacting Learning: Role Play as an Active Learning Strategy**

Sarah Gaby and Didem Türkoğlu
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

It’s a Monday in Sociology 420 and students are dressed in their party colors. Two students are passionately debating the merits of centralized government. The classroom has been transformed from its once starkly white-walled lifelessness into the World Trade Center in Kempton Park, South Africa in 1993. The professor, known as the game master since the start of the role play two weeks ago, sits in the back of the room, observing the proceedings and occasionally passing notes to students with pointed questions or comments about their recent speeches or next moves in the game. Passionate speeches follow discussions where members of factions and political parties share their visions of post apartheid South Africa at the end of a period of mass mobilization and bloody clashes. After a semester of studying various theories and the complex interactions amongst state and movement actors, students have finally reached the pinnacle – a chance to enact a political negotiation through the lens of a historical setting that led to one of the most modern constitutions in the world.

While across college campuses great efforts are being made to incorporate service and experiential learning into classrooms with varying success, much less attention has been paid to the innovative ways that experiential education can penetrate student experiences inside the classroom. Trends in pedagogy have led many to take an active learning approach to teaching, incorporating techniques like debate and group work in an effort to engage students beyond listening to lectures (Felder and Brent 2009). This form of student involvement improves the experience of students in the classroom, and benefits their thinking and writing skills (Bonwell and Eison 1991). Although there is a fair amount of literature on active learning strategies,
we have seen little on role playing as a form of active learning in sociology, despite the many benefits of simulation such as offering an innovative student-run way to make personal connections to the curriculum, gain academic skills, and participate in collective debate and decision-making.

In most sociology classes, students learn through reading group texts and discussing course material. Even when creative techniques are used in active classroom settings, instructors often find it challenging to keep students engaged and participating. Role playing, on the other hand, enables students to immerse themselves in the social conditions of a given setting and places the onus of running the course and building peer participation onto students. For example in the Greenwich Village, 1913 Reacting to the Past published role play (reacting.barnard.edu), Polly, a local shop owner, runs the majority of the class sessions in her bohemian underground restaurant. She tells her peers what they must accomplish, and encourages each faction to fight for their vision of the early 1900s and sway peers to vote for their cause. The Labor Faction tensely and passionately attacks the Suffrage Faction for thinking of the vote as a panacea, without noticing the layperson’s struggle to survive in dangerous underpaid factory positions. These games help students better understand core concepts like embeddedness, social interaction, and structural constraints. Furthermore, the practice of giving persuasive speeches provides a hands-on opportunity for argument evaluation and critical thinking.

Based on student responses on evaluations, the experiences of role playing are enjoyable, engaging, and challenging for students, in the best possible ways. Students often note that they’ve “never done anything like this” before in a class, and express that the activity stimulated their critical thinking, forced them out of their comfort zone and into a type of class participation they might otherwise avoid, and even note the emotional challenges of being on the “losing” side. One student, expressing their enjoyment of the role play, noted that there were many benefits such as having to fight for something that you may not believe in as your student perspective, learning about power, and gaining a deeper understanding of the course topic. The students say that the research they do as part of role playing is “fun” and the activity is “fascinating.” Not only is there an immense pedagogical payoff for these activities, but also students enjoy and learn from them in ways that cannot be achieved otherwise inside the classroom.

We highly encourage you to try role playing in your classrooms. There are multiple ways to incorporate role playing games including using of published games or games in development in the Reacting to the Past series, which you can gain access to through their website. These games have books of instructions for students and teachers, role sheets to assign student roles, and even a guide for how to run each day of the
activity. Plus, there's a Facebook page of faculty sharing experiences and asking questions, in case you get stuck (https://www.facebook.com/groups/1423350701217883/). These published games are especially helpful if you have never done this sort of activity before. Games fit various class sizes and can be a single class period, or last three to six weeks, and instructors can pick and choose what works for their courses. You can also create your own role play, such as those we have created. These games include a social theory game that asks students to act as theorists with the goal of helping them understand socio-political complex scholars like Karl Marx, Max Weber, or Antonio Gramsci, and a game of cumulative disadvantage where students must try to build an ideal city while the government and authority figures work against some and for others. If there is not a game that already works for a course, using the Reacting to the Past series as a model can help you develop your own course-specific role play.

Despite experiences of initial student resistance to this pedagogical approach, in every classroom that we have completed these activities, students who struggled in the remainder of the course or rarely if ever participated come to life, speaking and interacting with the material and classmates in a manner otherwise unattainable. Students are often seen remaining in the classroom long after the period has ended, negotiating with other factions or strategizing for the following day. In our experience, this level of pedagogical engagement is extremely hard to generate in other classroom settings and activities. Even if you are skeptical as an instructor, we highly encourage you to give these games a try for a few days in your next course, see if the benefits are as we have described, and enjoy watching your students become passionate and engaged agents of their own learning.

References


Justice for Adjuncts

Making a “Living” as an Adjunct

Theresa Mariani
Waubonsee Community College*
Purdue University Northwest*

Can a person make a living as an adjunct? While some would rightfully argue the adjunct position is not intended, by definition, to be a full-time position, the fact