

The International Preparation for Fashion (IPF) (cert. HE) course at the London College of Fashion (LCF) prepares international students for undergraduate study in fashion. Our diverse cohort of 250 students from approximately 35 different countries comes not only with cross-cultural misunderstanding, but also comedy. With a view to embracing the comedic nature of cross-cultural communication we use play as a tool.

The 'Factory' model, developed in the Fashion Business School offers rapid-fire, interactive and playful workshops throughout the course of the one-day event. The Communication factory is based on this model as well as Kuh and Zhao's (2004) findings, which suggest that the establishment of playful, co-curricular learning communities are positively linked to attainment and a sense of belonging. We use playful approaches to intercultural communication that value and at times laugh at our differences with a view to building an enhanced sense of belonging within a learning community. The day focuses on task-based learning encouraging transferrable academic skills such as; creative thinking, project management, intercultural communication, critical discussion and teamwork.

The aim is to recognize and acknowledge that international students often experience culture shock, language shock and academic shock (Caroll and Ryan, 2005). Sovic (2008) refines these observations to: integration with other students, English language and academic socialisation respectively. Our own observations suggest that the main causes of concern are around food and getting lost and so, among other activities, we play tea parties, treasure hunt and, since we are fashion students, dressing up.

The *Global dressing up* workshop allows students access to a selection of cultural fabrics. In small multicultural groups, they select 5 pieces and create a look, which they then present to their peers. What was interesting was challenging pre-established cultural meanings and seeing them from different perspectives but also empowering students to use their own cultural capital to talk about fabrics from their own culture.

In *Global treasure* hunt, one member of the group is blindfolded and relies on instructions from their group members to find random cultural objects around the building and peg them onto a washing line. Students then see these objects juxtaposed against each other and often see them as a metaphor for themselves. Informal discussion around the meaning of the objects follows and encourages the use of prior learning and experience.

At the *Global tea party* students design a menu based on dishes from their own culture. They then make the pretend food out of whatever materials are at hand. Being an art school, the results are often of a high quality. They then serve their "guests" – each other and dressmakers dummies. Again there is informal discussion over 'dinner' and a lot of laughter.

Feedback has been largely positive. Once the students remember how to play, it can be a real leveler, removing any power dynamics. In addition, *The Communication Factory* enables students to practice and develop academic skills, which they can draw on for range of tasks and assignments throughout the year. It also allows us all to have fun.

Bibliography

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