

By inviting these adults' brains to see something difficult and challenging (the degree plan and a self-directed graduate program) in terms of something familiar and unthreatening, this approach gives them an opportunity to imagine and feel, at a body level, that they are in charge of this process, rather than at the mercy of it.

Anything to Declare?

Ken White's work with nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations has focused on transformation at various scales, from the group and organizational up to the global. Participants might include organizational members at several levels, as well as faculty and graduate students in both traditional and nontraditional educational settings, often of various nationalities. In such circumstances, Ken notes, "cultural assumptions, which are always present but often largely invisible, can make collaboration—or even just discussion—challenging."

In one case, his organizational group had been invited as participants-observers—*agents provocateur* for an event in which two groups with strong intracultural identities had been brought together to embark on conversations toward collaboration. He found that

at one early session, it was clear the conversation was not going well. There appeared to be a lack of understanding about the worldviews and work styles of the respective parties. The groups were from two different educational systems, and each group included people of various nationalities. Several misalignments seemed to be creating a sense of confusion and mistrust.

During the break, Ken's group brainstormed an intervention building on the international character of the participants. The metaphor of crossing borders seemed a potentially useful way to build on familiar (i.e., embodied) experiences.

In an area just outside the meeting room, Ken and his colleagues arranged tables and chairs and posted signs (handmade in the moment) announcing that this was the Customs point, the crossing point into a place of trust building and collaboration. Setting up their official domain and roles, they tricked themselves out with name tags and amusing bureaucratic “titles,” brandished notepads or clipboards, buttoned up their shirts, and tried to look semiofficial. They also maintained a playful stance, laughing and joking as they moved the participants through the activity. “First,” Ken said,

we herded them out into the courtyard and announced that before they could again enter the meeting, each person had to go through Customs—our little table and chair gauntlet. They would be asked if they had “anything to declare.” By “anything,” we meant any assumptions they were carrying about other people or organizations, or the nature of the work they might try to do together, or just something they had on their minds. They could get that out now and not have to bring it with them into the larger work session.

Ken’s group explained that each participant would be questioned by a “customs officer,” who would give them the chance to explicitly articulate whatever feelings or ideas about other individuals or groups might get in the way of careful listening and open attention. Participants easily joined in the role play and queued up in a way that provided privacy for those currently being interviewed.

In the interview, the simple question, “Do you have anything to declare?” was surprisingly effective. If someone too breezily said, “No, I’m fine,” we good-humoredly sent him or her to a second customs officer. That officer might

remind them, “This is a great place to park baggage you don’t need to take into the room,” and let them know that if they wanted to pick up that baggage later, it would still be there, waiting for them. That usually got a laugh and a response. There were about forty or so participants, and a half-dozen of us, so the whole activity took about twenty minutes. Participants from both groups called the activity a positive experience of having been heard, and the tone of the ensuing discussion had noticeably shifted toward more open engagement.

Bringing to awareness and verbalizing ideas and feelings that otherwise remain unrecognized can also often attenuate them. Like some prehistoric photophobic organism, anxiety often loses its grip when exposed to the light. Some version of this activity could be adapted to many situations where groups of “outsiders” need to join and collaborate with the “home team.”

Multicultural Awareness

In his workshops on topics ranging from community mediation training to diversity training, Donald Proby emphasizes the importance of multicultural awareness:

Although the brain is wired to establish who is “like us” and “not like us,” the categories we use to make that distinction are culturally learned. So after we have created a safe environment for this kind of exploration, I provide some context—such as an identity wheel—that describes core identities. [These are available on many websites.] It helps us locate some of the many ways in which we organize ourselves into categories, often without realizing it.

Then Donald uses imaginal activities that involve body-based memories. After inviting people to pair off, he starts by naming a