

**The 2nd Annual
Intercultural Horizons Conference**

**Empathy, Action, and
Intercultural Competence:**

**A Neurological Rationale
for Simulation's Effectiveness
in Developing Intercultural Competence**

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Context: Research blended with

Writing Studies in the Community II

- A Service-learning English composition course
- Freshmen *Inclusive Special-Education* majors
- Paired with an *Introduction to Urban Education* course
- Associated with the Global Workforce Project
- Focus: Developing relationships between
 - Ideas (Coherence)
 - People (Empathy)

Techniques used to develop students'

Empathy and Intercultural competencies:

1. *Writing assignments* that integrate students' service-learning experiences with their literature-based research

2. *Reflective listening* activities

3. *Panel discussions*

These three contribute to the design of

4. *Simulations/Role-plays*

Sample *Writing Assignment* Instructions

INTENDED READERS: SUNY Cortland education majors who have not yet learned how to teach children with disabilities – especially children who are from cultures other than these future teachers' own cultures.

Sample Student Work

The Chinese culture views having a disability as a “punishment for the disabled person’s parental or past-life sins,” and disabilities are “blamed on evil spirits or punishment from god(s)” (Waldman et al., 2010). This view is not unique to China... (Dimes, 2009).

Thus, it would not be uncommon to have a student whose parents or grandparents view having a disability as an equivalent to an evil spirit.

Technique: *Reflective Listening* is used in

- **Reflective peer-review sessions (during revision phase of major writing assignments)**
- **Discussion of students' presentations**
- **Interviewing an authority (as a source for an essay)**
- **Tutoring and mentoring (service-learning projects)**
- **A service-learning reflection based on a reflective-listening experience**

Technique: *Panel Discussion*

- **Guest speakers from a variety of cultures**
- **Cross-cultural (mis)Communication Panel**

Discussion

Technique: *Simulation/Role-play...* used in

- Professional training settings

Ethics and
Aging

To develop
empathy

To strengthen
problem-
solving skills

Customer-service
training

To build
confidence

For anger
management

Oncology

To develop
flexibility

- **English classes**

- **Literature (science-fiction) class to develop**

- **Reading comprehension**

- **Empathy for characters in students' own stories**

(Students can more credibly match a character's behavior in a scene to the character's personality by role-playing that character.)

- **Composition class to develop**

- **Empathy**

- **Cultural competencies**

Simulation is a kind of experiential learning:

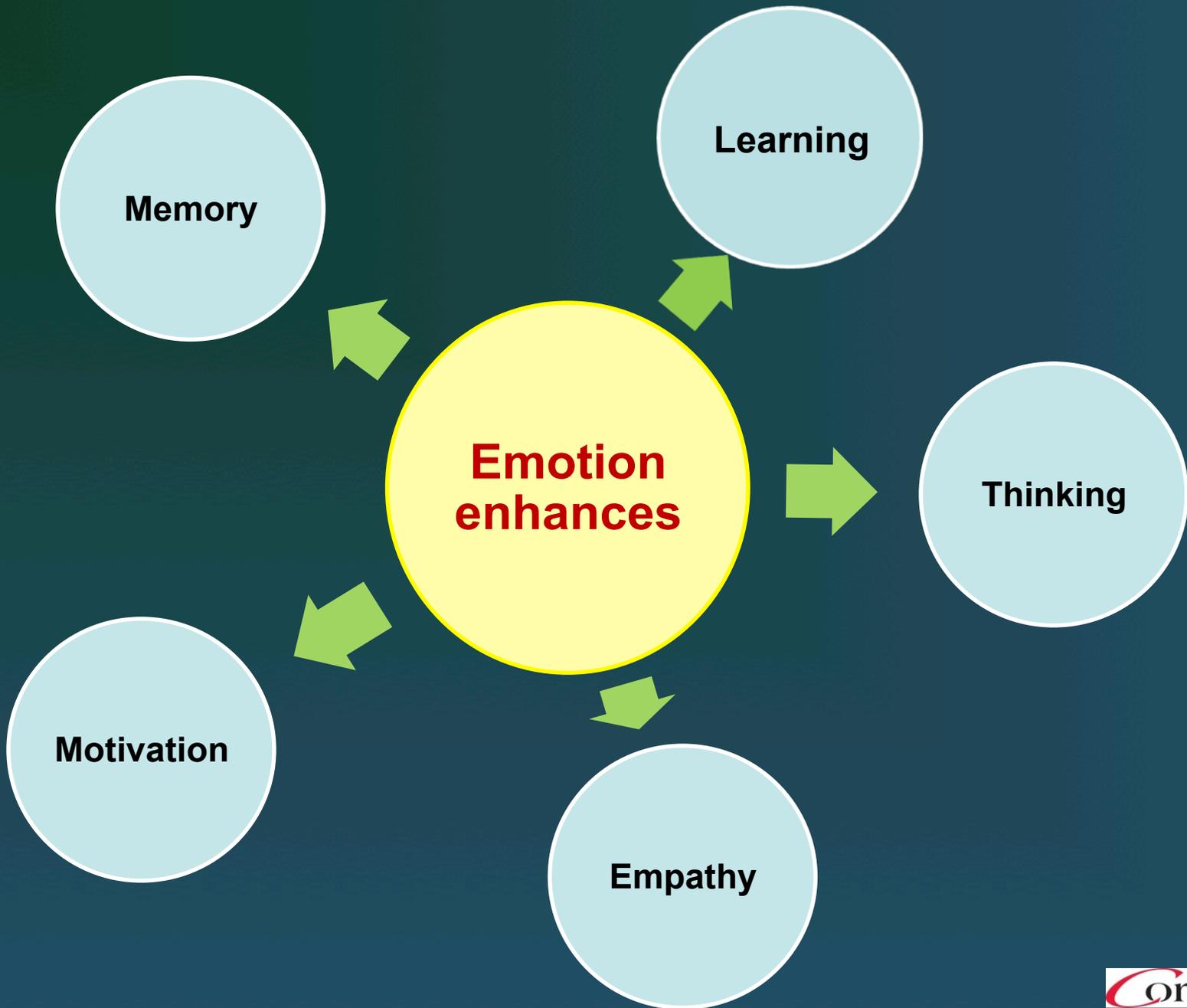
The student

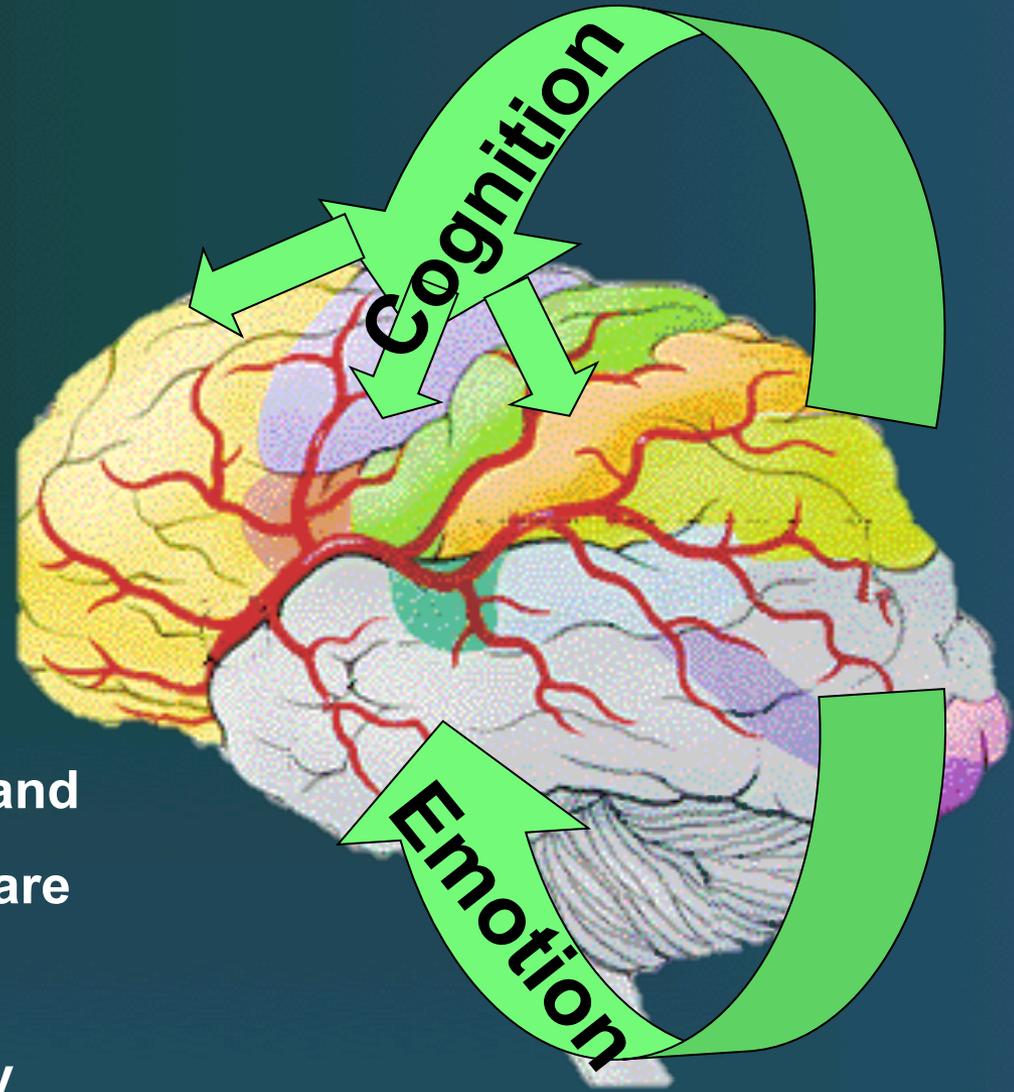
1. “Has control over [his/her] learning experience” (Boggs et al., 2007, p. 834)
2. Engages in real-life, “practical dilemmas” (Doron, 2007, p. 755)
3. Can experience emotions
4. Is active; uses all of his/her senses

Our emotions and our senses are crucial elements in simulations' effectiveness:

1. Our brains integrate emotion and cognition.

- **Emotion is integral to thinking** (Dolan, 2002; Felten et al., 2006, p. 41).
- **“Emotion and cognition cannot be separated”** (Caine and Caine, 1990, p. 67).



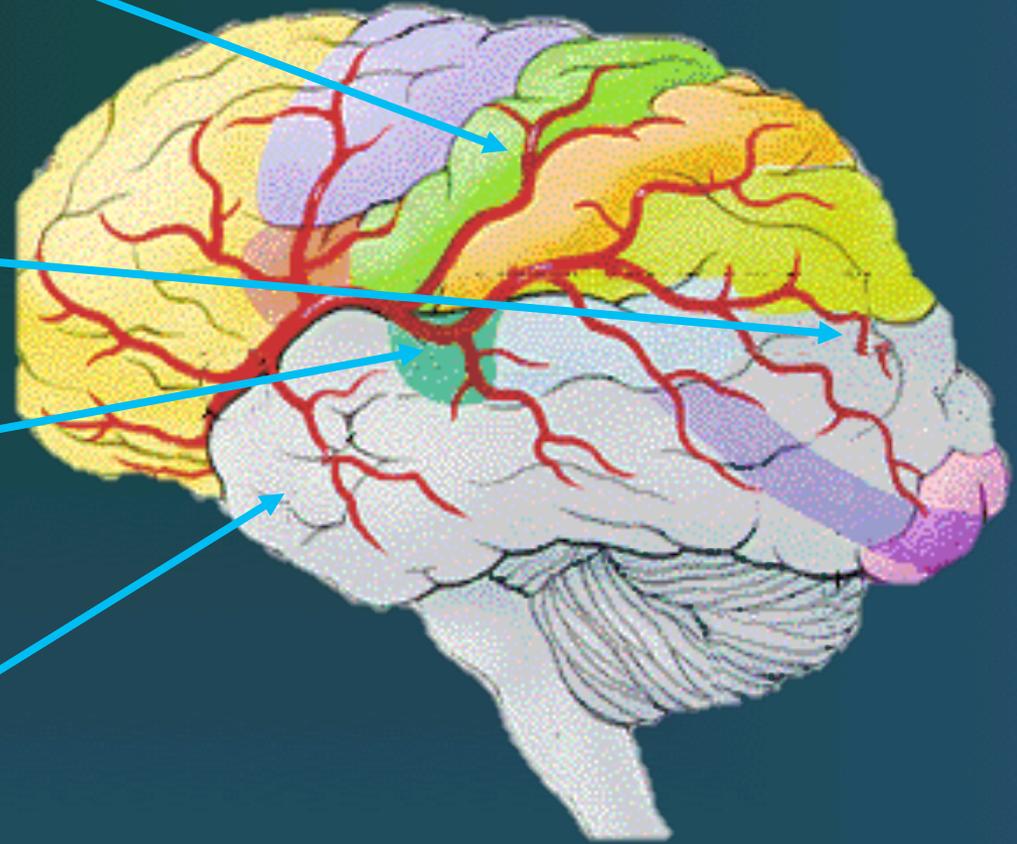


The brain's emotion-oriented and cognition-oriented regions share information in ways that make emotion and cognition virtually indistinguishable.

2. Our brains accept imagined activity as real, regardless of the senses involved.

“...from a neuroscientific point of view, imagining an act and doing it are not as different as they sound. ...Brain scans show that in action and imagination, many of the same parts of the brain are activated” (Doige, 2007, pp. 203-204)

Neurologically,
simulation *is* real-life.



Each of our senses – including movement – “interprets” information differently; combining them in activities such as service-learning and simulation gives us a richer, more nuanced understanding of experience.

Simulation takes advantage of these neurological functions

- **Students are placed in situations that generate a variety of emotions, including emotions that grow from cognitive dissonance.**
- **Students use all of their senses and physical movement.**

Simulations can be based on

- Students' research
- Students' service-learning experiences
- Panel discussions



Student Reflections **based on *State of Poverty Simulation***

- **“Though it was only a simulation, I was stressed-out.”**
- **“My attitudes toward welfare have changed, I realized that it’s hard to balance everything and not get overwhelmed. It’s also hard when you can’t get any help.”**
- **“This experience changed my views of people in poverty. I did not realize how much work it was to live in poverty.”**
- **“I felt like a second-hand citizen.”**

**Student Reflections
based on simulations
that were based on incidents
described during panel discussions**

- “We need to be careful when working with [immigrant] children – and with their *parents*.”
- “How can we design lessons for kids from many backgrounds when they’ re in the same class?”
- “How do we know if [student/teacher] disagree-ments are culturally-based? Couldn’ t they come from money problems at home?”

Simulation guidelines, specific

Emotion:

1. For added credibility, base simulations on real-life situations.
2. Base simulations on emotionally-jarring situations.
3. Promote emotional engagement by using an extemporaneous approach (no scripts).
4. Before beginning the event, help participants “get into” their roles.
5. Provide time for written, “graphic,” and/or spoken reflection.

Senses / Movement

1. Design simulations that require movement and interaction with other people.
2. Provide props – They facilitate “imagining.”

Simulation guidelines, general

1. “Road-test” the simulation before running it
2. State the purpose of the simulation
3. Provide appropriate context, such as
 - a. Local and national socio-economic data
 - b. Cultural characteristics
4. Encourage alternate views on specific issues
5. Assess and refine the simulation

Simulation example

Situation: After the chair of a Parent-Teacher Organization committee asks for volunteers, one committee member becomes upset and no longer shows interest in participating.

Explanation: The committee member is from a culture in which a person shows another person respect by asking *directly* for *his* help (indicating, in this way, value in that person's knowledge and skill).

Simulation example

Situation: You are a child who, at first, cooperates with your tutor. Your tutor has tried to be sure that you understand his/her comments by asking you to make eye-contact with him.

Explanation: However, you become increasingly resistant to his efforts to help you because you are from a country in which a child's direct eye contact with an elder is considered to be a lack of respect – as your parents often remind you.

Simulation example

Situation: From across a room, you see someone you recently met; you wave and say “Hello,” then move on. The next time you meet that person, he seems aloof.

Explanation: One reason might be that you did not ask about his family, especially about specific family members;

another reason might be that you did not touch the person when you said hello.

Simulation example

Situation: You are in your first-grade class; as you begin reading, “Jack and Jill went up the hill together...,” you notice that one particular child seems to be uncomfortable with the story.

Explanation: That child is from a culture in which boys and girls do not play together; rather, they are kept apart.

Simulation example

Situation: During one lesson in your American History class, you ask a student for her opinion regarding a particular president's decision.

The student responds (sincerely), “I do not understand why you are asking *me*. You should know the answer – you're the teacher!”