

Lesson title: Visualizing Global Populations

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Summary: If there were only forty people in the world, but they fit current global demographic distributions, who would you be? In this in-class exercise, students are assigned new international identities based on global demographics. Students are each given six cards which designate a new religion, a new residence in a global region, a new primary language, a new gender, a new ethnicity, etc. The cards also ascribe inclusion in miscellaneous global issues: poverty, illiteracy, and so on. The instructor shows the class the relative size of various world populations, via visual analogy—he or she asks students to stand as their various identity positions are named, then to sit back down, etc.

Objectives:

1. Representation: Students develop a recognition that all acts of representation are always partial—that they are shaped by the questions asked and the perspectives of those creating the representation. Therefore, students will be more critical consumers of such representations in the future.
2. Living in the world: Students develop knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to live effectively in a world possessing limited natural resources and characterized by ethnic diversity, cultural pluralism and increasing interdependence.
3. Diversity: Students should gain an awareness of international diversity and learn to think about what the world, or specific issues, might look like from other points of view.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students acquire a sense of scale of various global populations.

Materials Required: Nine sets of cards. Seven sets should be equal to the number of students in the class. Each card describes a demographic category as listed in the table below. This table calculates the number of students who should be placed into each category for classes of 30, 40 and 50. Thus for a class of thirty, there will be 15 cards labeled “male” and 15 labeled “female” in the Sex category.

Lesson Activities:

1. Tell students that you'd like them to participate in an exercise that approximates the various populations of the globe. Explain that you think this may sharpen their current understanding of the relative sizes of international groups.
2. Have one or two students hand out cards—one from each group of cards to each student in class.
3. Ask students representing each demographic to stand up.

- a. Begin with gender. For example, ask “How many of you are women?” (In a class of 40, 20 should stand up. Give students a moment to look around and get a sense of the number.) Then ask, “How many are men?”
 - b. Repeat with age
 - c. Repeat with region of residence.
 - d. Repeat with religion.
 - e. Repeat with languages.
 - f. Repeat with employment
 - g. Repeat with incomes.
 - h. Ask how many are unable to read.
 - i. Ask how many suffer from malnutrition.
4. After the exercise has been completed to your satisfaction, ask students to write for 5 minutes about the exercise. Ask them to answer the following questions: “What was the most surprising thing you learned?” and “What question is uppermost in your mind?”
 5. After they’ve gotten a few thoughts arranged on paper, discuss their perceptions as a class.

Comments: In the experience of instructors who’ve used it, this is an extremely simple but powerful technique for giving students a sense of where they fit in the world. It is especially useful in giving mainstream U.S. students a sense of how big the world is and how unique their positions as middle-class Americans actually are. It is generally used at the beginning of a class to generate class discussion. It can be used as an introduction to global issues, or in conjunction with the Geography chapter, or it can be used as part of a lesson on globalization.

The most obvious problem with this exercise is that unless the instructor carefully matches who gets what cards (which is unwieldy), demographic associations are lost. The fact that two thirds of illiterates are women, that illiteracy is clustered in South and West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab states, or that globally unemployment is highest among young people are a few examples of important global demographic issues that are lost in this kind of exercise. Class discussion should be directed to pay attention to these issues of representation. One useful technique might be to make this exercise an introduction to the “Geographical Writing” assignment, in which students learn to deal with demographics in a more sophisticated way.

There is also a bit of deliberate “skewing” in order to make the exercise work. This is most obvious in the language section. As a matter of strict proportionality the skewing would become meaningless after three languages in a class of 30 students. In order to have students recognize the sheer number of languages, we have chosen to allow a single student to represent languages for which, in fact, the percentages are not only too low to register in a class of 30, but even fall below one percent. Again, it is important that instructors raise this point during class discussions.

Category	Percentage	Class of 30	40	50
Sex Source: World Factbook 2007				
Male	50.014%	15	20	25
Female	49.986%	15	20	25
Age Source: World Factbook 2007				
0-14	27.4	8	11	14
15-64	65.1	20	26	33
64+	7.5	2	3	3
Region of Residence Source: Population Reference Bureau 2007				
Sub-Saharan Africa	11	3	4	5
North America	5	2	2	3
Latin America	9	3	3	4
Asia	58	17	24	29
Europe	11	3	4	6
Middle East & North Africa	6	2	3	3
Religion Source: www.adherents.com				
Christian	33%	10	13	16
Roman Catholic	17.03	5	7	10
Protestant	5.8	2	3	3
Orthodox	3.42	1	2	2
Anglican	1.23	1	1	1
Muslim	21%	6	8	11
Sunni	19	5	7	10
Shi'a	2	1	1	1
Hindu	14%	4	6	7
Buddhist	6%	2	3	3
Indigenous	5%	1	1	2
Traditional Chinese	5%	1	1	2
Nonreligious	15%	5	7	8
Other (Sikhism)	1%	1	1	1
Languages Sources: World Factbook, Ethnologue				
Mandarin Chinese	13.69%	4	5	6
Spanish	5.05	2	2	3
English	4.84	1	2	3
Arabic	3.23	1	1	2
Hindi	2.82	1	1	1
Portuguese	2.77	1	1	1
Bengali	2.68	1	1	1
Russian	2.27	1	1	1
Japanese	1.99	1	1	1
German	1.49	1	1	1
Wu Chinese	1.21	1	1	1
Javanese	<1%	1	1	1
Korean	<1%	1	1	1

French	<1%	1	1	1
Vietnamese	<1%	1	1	1
Telugu (India)	<1%	1	1	1
Yue Chinese	<1%	1	1	1
Italian	<1%	1	1	1
Malay	<1%	0	1	1
Turkish	<1%	0	1	1
Vietnamese	<1%	0	0	1
Marathi (India, Kenya)	<1%	0	0	1
Tamil (India)	<1%	0	0	0
Urdu	<1%	0	0	0
Min Nan	<1%	0	0	0
Jinyu (Chinese)	<1%	0	0	0
Gujarati (India)	<1%	0	0	0
Polish	<1%	0	0	0
Ukrainian	<1%	0	0	0
Persian	<1%	0	0	0
Other languages	38.96	8	14	18
Employment	Source: World Factbook, UN Global Employment Trends			
Not in labor market	44.7%	13	18	22
Unemployed	6.3	2	2	3
Agricultural labor	19.9	6	8	10
Industry	10.0	3	4	5
Service	19.1	6	8	10
Income	Source: International Labor Organization, World Bank			
\$96,800	2.5%	1	1	1
\$28,850	5%	2	2	2
\$ 7,389	42.5	13	17	21
\$ 3,256	29.3	8	12	14
Less than \$2/day	20.7	6	8	12
How many of you...				
Are illiterate	13%	4	5	7
Suffer from malnutrition?	19.2%	6	8	10