

# Teaching Awareness of Stereotyping

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## Introduction

As technology develops, the number of situations of communicating with people from different countries has been increasing. In many fields, learning a non-native language is one of the requirements to be successful. A number of people throughout the world learn English because English is becoming an international language. Language is an important tool of communication. However, mastering a non-native language is not enough to become a skillful communicator; we need to learn and improve other intercultural communication skills.

In order to have successful intercultural communication, it is essential that communicators avoid incorrect stereotyping. Incorrect stereotyping tends to appear in the communication between two or more people who are physically different, for example "interracial communication." Unfortunately, the difference in physical appearance often provokes unfavorable and inaccurate presuppositions of other people. This could hinder further potential communication. Any new impression which does not match stereotypical ideas is discarded.

Family, friends, and education provide us with in-group reference to other cultural groups, out-group people. Mass media can especially foster negative stereotypes of out-group people. One of many intercultural communication skills is to be critical of information sources. The following activities can develop students' awareness of stereotyping and develop students' skills in understanding culture. These activities are designed for intermediate and advanced-level students, but they can be adapted for other levels.

## Preparation

Collect many photos of people which do not show their occupations: a picture of a black accountant who looks like a basketball player, a female leader of a country students are not familiar with. It is not necessary to find many pictures, but more than four would be ideal in order to have good ethnic diversity. You can find these pictures in your personal photo albums and magazines.

Write three or four sentences which indicate "likely" occupations of the person in each photograph. For example, using a photograph of Sandra Day O'Connor, who is a U.S. Supreme Court Justice. I wrote the following sentences from which students had to choose which sentence they thought to be most likely:

1. She is a high school teacher who was awarded best teacher of 1995 in the United States.
2. She is a Supreme Court Justice of the United States of America who has dealt with difficult cases like the death penalty, abortion, and affirmative action.
3. She is a home economist, who is a regular writer for a monthly house-keeping and gardening magazine. She writes on how to grow a healthy garden in the back yard of small homes.

These sentences should be written to fit the level of your class.

## Classroom Procedures

### Activity 1

A teacher must preteach vocabulary that students may not understand. Then, hand out the exercise sheet to students for them to work on individually. Limit the amount of time they work on the exercise. The amount of time depends upon the number of pictures. The time should be only enough for the students to make rapid answers because stereotyping occurs in the first impression of pictures. It is important that the teacher does not provide a definition of stereotyping before this exercise, so students do not have any

assumptions about what effects the teacher is trying to produce out of this class exercise.

After students have responded to the questions, the teacher gives them answers. According to my experience, most students answers are incorrect, as a result of relying on their stereotypes. Through this exercise, students become aware of their stereotypes. Finally, the teacher presents students with a definition of stereotyping, "A rigid mental image that summarizes whatever is believed to be typical about a group" (Robertson 1987). The teacher should mention influences from stereotyping in communication among different group people. Negative stereotypical ideas of other groups prevent effective communication which lead to prejudice and discrimination against those groups.

Next, divide students into small groups. Assign each group a specific photo. Have them discuss their stereotypes of the group that the person in the photo belongs to. A spokesperson in each group presents their findings.

## **Activity 2**

Keep students in small groups. Distribute one English magazine for each group. Let students examine advertisements in the magazines. Students are asked to find a couple of advertisements which contain stereotyping ideas of gender, ethnic group, social status, and so on. Give a different student a chance to be spokesperson and another different student a chance to be a note taker. Then let students answer questions in regard to each advertisement. For example;

- What stereotypes can you find in the advertisement?
- Does the advertisement contain specific information about the products?
- Is the stereotyping image positive or negative for the group?
- How are the stereotypes used for marketing purposes?

## **Conclusion**

Teachers can use these materials not only to provide students chances to learn English, but also to develop students awareness of their stereotyping. Because these activities are eye-opening for students, they participate well.