World Summit Activity for Agenda Setting and Framing

The Idea

Students can have a difficult time not only understanding abstract principles and concepts in our field, such as agenda-setting, but also have a challenging time imagining the interaction between two abstract concepts, such as agenda setting and framing.

The Goals

I wanted to create an interactive, active-learning, hands-on activity that would bring agenda setting and framing to life while incorporating vital career skills necessary to succeed in our field, including public speaking, persuasion, social influence, critical thinking, research, decision making, and teamwork. Therefore, I created an activity aimed at giving students an active-learning activity that would personalize the framing of messages while understanding that these chosen, mediated frames, in turn, develop messages that become part of a broader, intersecting agenda.

One of the main goals of this activity is to get the students to recognize that it is essential to hear all voices. This activity levels the playing field and gets students to think about what their audience wants to hear and how they can best deliver a particular message in a crowd of competing and complementary voices. This activity can be used in Media, Culture, and Society, Public Relations, Media Effects, Persuasion, Media Literacy, Intercultural Communication, and a multitude of other communication classes discussing the needs and desires of competing groups.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

The basic concept of the game operates similar to Model United Nations, a worldwide simulation game where different "cultural" groups frame messages for a World Council. The World Council, in turn, is responsible for agenda setting by drafting a media resolution in a way that satisfies the group(s) with the most persuasively-framed arguments.

1. The instructor will explain all the rules.

    a. **Rules**: In the activity, multiple interest groups (i.e., 5 or 6 students) are responsible for thinking of a way to frame their messages in a manner that satisfies their constituency. Each group is trying to gain the most influence. Another group of 5 to 6 students will participate in a World Council that is responsible for assigning up to 5 points per round/session for the group(s) with the best-framed arguments. No more than three groups can be selected each round. Interest groups will have 1 minute to present their appropriately-framed messages to the World Council. The World Council can ask for more framed arguments among different groups to decide upon the allocation of points. In that case, each group will have 30-seconds to present a framed message that effectively rebuttals a competing point-of-view. After the rebuttal session, the World Council must state why they felt a specific frame worked for them and report their binding resolution agenda heavily incorporating more of the points of the most persuasively-framed interest group(s).

2. The instructor will announce which students were assigned to specific interest groups. The instructor announces all interests groups and all topics at this time (see Appendix A).

3.   After the students are settled in their interest groups or on the World Council, have them take approximately 5 minutes to get acclimated to the positioning of their interest group, find their interest group's position on the Internet, and to establish a plan on how to quickly research and tackle the list of forthcoming topics. Students assigned to the World Council are responsible for creating a rubric and tie-breaking rules in advance.

4.   Repeat the rules once more and announce the first topic.

5.   Give each interest group at least 4 minutes to discuss and frame an appropriate 1-minute message. Every group gets to present their message. In subsequent rounds, begin with different groups to ensure that one group does not have to go first all of the time.

6.   Start wrapping up the activity with approximately 10 minutes remaining for a debrief.

How have students reacted?

• With great interest. Students have asked me if I could think of another activity like this one.

> *"Overall I enjoyed the activity because I had a chance to get an understanding of a different culture that I originally didn't know anything about. The relation the activity had with media effects was … how the culture we represented saw the media as an overall whole. It was also informative because we had to go back and see how our people in the culture view the media and how we could appeal to them …. It's also a fun and interactive way to get students to understand the concept of appealing to different audiences in the media [excerpt from a recent student].*

The Debrief and What are the takeaways from students?

Questions to ask after the activity:

1.   What were your main takeaways from the exercise? *Generally, students admit that they are just passively consuming messages throughout the day without thinking about 1) who created the framing of a particular message or 2) what purpose they had for using that frame.* (This can lead to a discussion about Social Cognitive Theory and Media Literacy)

2.   Did any group think of a frame that you found to be very persuasive? Why?

a.   Was anything about the delivery (i.e., the person, their way of speaking, having other groups take a similar position) of the message that made it more effective? What was it? (This can lead to a discussion about Spiral of Silence)

3.   Were there some groups that tended to frame messages similarly? Why did they do this? (This should generate a discussion about how they share similar elements of an agenda)

4.   How have the frames that I have chosen to and chosen not to listen that impacted your ability to be persuaded? (This can lead to a discussion about Uses and Gratifications)

5.   Do you agree that you should start processing messages like the world council who was fully aware of the message source and had complete knowledge that they may be receiving biased messages from every group? Why or why not? (This can lead to a discussion about passive listening to your point-of-view being more enjoyable, but less effective in the long run).

Appendix A

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<u>Issue Groups</u>

- Environments
- Fossil Fuel Industry
- The Catholic Church
- The Islamic Council
- The Top 1%
- The bottom 10%
- The Liberal Press
- The Conservative Press
- Women's Rights Groups
- Men's Rights Groups
- The Pornographic Industry
- Consumer Interest Groups
- Groups Representing Rights for the LGBTQ+ Community
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

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<u>Agenda Topics</u>

- Censorship (What types of media content should be made available? What types of media content should be banned? Why?)
- Access to media (Who should have access to high-speed Internet? Who should have access to mobile phones? Why?)
- Cost of Media (Who should pay for programming? What types of programming should be free and what types of programming should be paid? Why?)
- Should every group identify themselves before advertising on social media?

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*Special note to keep the interactivity consistent: See if the students are thinking of ideas faster or slower than the suggested time. Some groups might be doing an excellent job of thinking of frames, so the activity may be focused on those groups. If so, instructors please adjust the activity so that the focus remains equally on the viability of every group having a voice on the agenda, even if you make students switch groups.