

“Genuine”

The power of intercultural communication at National Model United Nations.

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SPCHH: Honors Argumentation and Debate

04.08.2024

Introduction

National Model United Nation – New York is a collegiate level of Model United Nations in New York City involving universities and students from all international backgrounds. It “promotes students' learning opportunities in three successive ways: optimizing individual development through unmoderated caucus, growing competitiveness through working paper forum and sharpening problem-solving skill through draft -resolution forum”¹. While it is a simulation of the United nation, this is a conference where students can foster and hone important skills such as public speaking and leadership skills.

In a conference where committee sizes vary, ranging from 300 delegates in one room to 50 delegates in one room². It is crucial that no matter which settings you are in, you can give a good speech in front of all your fellow delegates and lead them. As Sihame stated “Leadership is one of the most complex and multidimensional phenomena.”³. But in a conference where everyone is trained to speak publicly, some do not even require a note with them when giving a speech. How do you make yourself stand out from the rest? The same question remains with leadership, in a conference where everyone is trained to lead and are leaders themselves. How do you stand out amongst those people and lead them?

In what follows throughout this paper, using autoethnography, I will dive into my experience as a delegate at the National Model United Nation – New York conference. The paper

¹ Sukma Septian Nasution and Nur Najibah Sukmawati, “Model United Nations: Improving the Students’ Speaking Skill,” *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)* 4, no. 2 (October 14, 2019): 47–52, <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v4i2.2100>.

² “About Us,” By the Numbers, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://www.nmun.org/about-nmun/by-the-numbers.html>.

³ Benmira, Sihame. “Evolution of Leadership Theory.” *BMJ*, 2021. <https://bmjleader.bmj.com/content/leader/5/1/3.full.pdf>.

will also take a deeper look into and analyze position papers. Analyzing what makes a good speaker and leader when it comes down to a room full of people who are trained to do just that. Emphasizing how you can stand out and captivate people into doing what you want them to do.

Literature Review

Introduction to ethnography and autoethnography

Exploring the world of ethnography, Conquergood introduced the idea of ethnography to us as a type of study that involved being in the environment that you are observing⁴. However, “Moral and ethical questions get stirred to the surface because ethnographers of performance explode the notion of aesthetic distance.”⁵. But in their effort to understand the complexities on human beings outside of the average society, ethnographers “surrender themselves … to get close to the face of humanity where life is not always pretty”⁶. Conquergood have spent three and a half years conducting ethnographic fieldwork amongst Lao and Hmong refugees in Chicago⁷. Learning the performance of their oral narratives, Conquergood have performed these stories in front of refugees and dozens of audiences. Some audience showed a lot of negative feedback about the performance itself and some loved it.⁸ Taking the negative response, “more than approving applause, testifies to the moral implications of this kind of work”⁹. Getting started with autoethnography and the work of it, Cooper propose having as research question as the first step. Emphasizing “It is important that the research question reflects the focus of

⁴ Dwight Conquergood, Performing as a moral act: Ethical dimensions of the ..., 2003, <http://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/603/PerfasaMoralAct.pdf>.

⁵ Conquergood p. 2

⁶ Conquergood p. 1

⁷ Conquergood p. 2

⁸ Conquergood p. 3

⁹ Conquergood p. 4

autoethnography, which is exploring a cultural issue through one's personal story”¹⁰. Then, there is data collection, “One of the key questions that researchers ask when conducting an autoethnography is what constitutes their data”¹¹. There are many ways to collect data such as self-observation or access to external data such as photographs, letters, or reports of the events¹². Using those data, we can then move on to data analysis, “As you analyze your autoethnographic data, the following ethnographic analytical approaches will be useful and may be implemented in autoethnographic research: triangulation, pattern recognition, key events, content analysis, crystallization, and various types of visual representations”¹³. Finally, we can move on to writing the autoethnographic report itself and use “Descriptive-realistic writing seeks to depict an “accurate” story through extensive details that create a picture for the reader”¹⁴.

Leadership styles and theories

Leadership in politics and sports plays a crucial role in how successful the team can become. Unlike sports, “where the coach is a formal leader who can coexist with a team player who is an informal leader”¹⁵. Leadership in political conferences such as the United Nations where so many leaders around the world come together and try to lead one another becomes complicated. Leadership, like any evolving subject studied around the globe “continues to

¹⁰ Robin Cooper and Bruce Lilyea, “I’m Interested in Autoethnography, but How Do I Do It?,” *The Qualitative Report*, 2022, <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5288&context=tqr>.

¹¹ Cooper p. 199

¹² Cooper p. 199

¹³ Cooper p. 202

¹⁴ Cooper p. 205

¹⁵ Isabel Mercader-Rubio et al., “Relationships between Informal Sports Leadership and Emotional Intelligence: A Cross-Sectional Study,” *Sustainability* 15, no. 19 (October 8, 2023): 14571, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151914571>.

generate captivating and confusing debate due to the complexity of the subject.”¹⁶. But some leaders are more effective than others due to their unique styles of leading.

There are more popular leadership theories that are mostly agreed upon by Sihame¹⁷, Khan¹⁸, and Harrison¹⁹ including great man theory, behavioral theory, situational/contingent theory, and transactional or transformational theory. Khan provides us with the idea that great man theory is “leaders...born and that only those men who are endowed with heroic potentials could ever become the leaders.”²⁰. Contrasting the last theory, in Sihame’s word, behavioral theory, “rather than born and that particular behaviours can be learnt to ensure effective leadership. It puts emphasis on the actual behavior of the leader and not on their traits or characteristics”²¹. Harrison wants to acknowledge the “weaknesses in past research findings concerning leader behaviours and effectiveness, scholars moved towards a contingency theory in an effort to redress the shortcomings of the behavioural theory.”²². Defining the definition, Harrison stated that “The contingency theory proposes that there is no optimum style of leadership. Effective leaders will use different styles based on the contingencies of the situation; hence, a style of leadership which was ideal in the past might not be of great use in the present.”²³. One more theory that I also think is important is relational theory, stated by Uhl-Bien “Relationships—rather than authority, superiority, or dominance—appear to be key to new forms

¹⁶ Sihame p. 3

¹⁷ Sihame p. 3 – p. 4

¹⁸ Zakeer Khan, Allah Nawaz, and Irfanullah Khan, “Leadership Theories and Styles: A Literature Review,” IISTE, 2016, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234696192.pdf>.

¹⁹ Christian Harrison, *Leadership Theory and Research*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68672-1>.

²⁰ Khan p. 1

²¹ Sihame p. 3

²² Harrison p. 27

²³ Harrison p. 27

of leadership” that can lead us to a more effective way of leading others who feels like they need to be acknowledged²⁴.

The power of public speaking and intercultural communication

Public speaking is an especially important skill to possess, as explained by Carnegie and agreed by Ihsan²⁵ “Public speaking is public utterance... of the man himself; therefore the... importance is that the man should be and think and feel things that are worthy of being given forth.”²⁶ Natsution would agree it is even more important when “positive appraisal...of Model United Nations in improving students’ speaking skill. It was evidently and empirically proven by quantitative and qualitative data respectively.”²⁷ Furthermore, the importance of understanding and communicating interculturally is an extension of public speaking itself. In the aim of promotion within Model United Nation and being knowledgeable in an extremely diverse conference. One of the goals was “optimizing individual development through unmoderated caucus”²⁸. Development through “intercultural sensitivity is required for successful and

²⁴ Mary Uhl-Bien, “Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the Social Processes of Leadership and Organizing,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6 (December 2006): 654–76, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lequa.2006.10.007>.

²⁵ Mas Darul Ihsan, “Students’ Motivation in Speaking English,” *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)* 1, no. 1 (April 12, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v1i1.147>.

²⁶ Dale Carnegie and J. Berg Esenwein, *The Art of Public Speaking: The Original Tool for Improving Public Oration* (New York, New York: Clydesdale Press, 2018).

²⁷ Nasution p. 52

²⁸ Nasution p. 47

productive communication between people from different cultural backgrounds”²⁹ as Wang³⁰ and Novinger³¹ would agree to the importance of intercultural sensitivity as well.

Methodology

The methodology that will be chosen for this paper will be ethnography. Conquergood believes that “Ethnographers study the diversity and unity of cultural performances as a universal human resource for deepening and clarifying the meaningfulness of life.”³² This led me to believe that ethnography is a type of research that implore the kind of need to be inside of the environment you are seeking to research in. That means if a person wants to research what it is like to be a Model United Nation delegate at the New York conference. They would be a delegate or observe all the other delegates in the back of a committee room and note things going on around the room. This year’s National Model United Nation team at Lone Star consists of roughly 30 members including alternates that were there to help. The team’s numbers were mostly made up of first years and little second years. Additionally, there were more female than male students participating on the team not by a significant amount, but the ratio was mostly 6:4 female to male.

The conference taken place in Hilton Midtown Manhattan, with more than 4,500 student delegates from around the globe attending, 395 faculties, and more than 144 volunteers³³.

²⁹ Guo-Ming Chen, “The Impact of Intercultural Sensitivity on Ethnocentrism and Intercultural Communication Apprehension,” DigitalCommons@URI, 2010, https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/com_facpubs/16/.

³⁰ Guo-Ming Chen, “The Impact of Intercultural Sensitivity on Ethnocentrism and Intercultural Communication Apprehension,” DigitalCommons@URI, 2010, https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/com_facpubs/16/.

³¹ Tracy Novinger, *Intercultural Communication a Practical Guide* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001).

³² Conquergood p. 1

³³ “About Us,” By the Numbers, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://www.nmun.org/about-nmun/by-the-numbers.html>.

National Model United Nation – New York is the largest and most prestigious university level Model UN conference in the world. Throughout the years, the growth of the program has become so diverse that 57% of participants being from outside of the U.S. including over 331 college/universities participating³⁴. In my specific committee (UNESCO), there was roughly 90 to 110 people in the room and the ratio was around 70% female and 30% male.

Data Analysis

Position papers are one crucial part of this conference, the submission happens before the conference itself starts. Position papers “consist information outlining each delegation’s policies on the topic being discussed in their specific committee. The position paper helps delegates organize their ideas and share their foreign policy with the rest of the committee.”³⁵. What comes with an outstanding position paper is being able to read and understand the background guide. Background guides are designed to “serves as an introduction to the topic for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State’s policies in depth and use the bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics.”³⁶. Additionally, position papers are to try and fit these background guides and fitting these background guides can be one crucial role in winning position paper awards. The background guide has laid out regional and international framework for the UNESCO committee. Emphasizing on the “Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) (1947)

³⁴ “About Us,” By the Numbers, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://www.nmun.org/about-nmun/by-the-numbers.html>.

³⁵ “Position Paper: Model UN: Fine Arts Humanities & Social Sciences,” Model UN | Fine Arts Humanities & Social Sciences | UMass Lowell, accessed April 13, 2024, <https://www.uml.edu/fahss/model-un/resources/position-paper.aspx#:~:text=Position%20Papers%20consist%20information%20outlining,the%20rest%20of%20the%20committee>.

³⁶ Sebastian Hieke et al., “NMUN-NY 2024 Background Guide - UNESCO,” NMUN - NY, 2024, <https://www.nmun.org/assets/documents/conferences/ny/nmun-ny24-bgg-unescor.pdf>.

specify the need for cultural preservation in article 27³⁷ as well as similar declarations focusing on human rights in topic one and two. Additionally, it is heavily encouraged that member states have some sort of sustainable development goals in their position papers along with advocating for the human rights of cultural properties for both topics.

Diving into comparative analysis, I have chosen 2 position papers from my committee that won the position paper award. The position papers are chosen from the delegation of France at Baylor University and from the delegation of Uruguay at University of Regensburg. In both topics, both papers have a shorter first paragraph compared to my paper. Also, their second paragraph contains more information about current dedication towards the topic from their assigned country and recognizing the issue at hand. Furthermore, France's third paragraphs specifically applaud the collaboration between IAEA and UNICRI while delving into their descriptive solutions on topic one³⁸. Uruguay also was very descriptive on their solutions in their third paragraph, advocating for a more enhanced collaboration between INTERPOL and UNESCO³⁹. Comparing this to my partner and I's position paper, I realized that our third and second paragraph was weak due to being a bit vague on the actions being taken at hand in the second paragraph. Onto the third paragraph comparison, recognizing our position paper's biggest weakness was we did not fully captivate being an NGO to our advantage. We did not make our solutions more narrowed down and mention that we can use this small-scale project to then use it as proof and be able to fund a bigger project to help all people. We tend to acknowledge a lot of

³⁷ Hieke p. 10

³⁸ "UNESCO_FRANCE.PDF," Google Drive, 2024,
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s5mMvuxWVqTalK6yrU9mnUuJ-KnVGqlt/view>.

³⁹ "UNESCO_URUGUAY.PDF," Google Drive, accessed April 13, 2024,
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_EGYJoJ2PVawEaZUKt-ftnLS6ZPWr707/view.

issues and give vague and non-concise actions as solutions rather than giving a step to take on how to specifically combat that solution at hand.

Assessing the data above, I initially thought that all three paragraphs hold the same weight when it comes to assessing which paper wins the position paper award. Additionally, I noticed in France's paper, for both of their topic solutions, they are always proposing either a two-part approach or two-pronged solutions. Their two-part solution adds weight into the argument that they are making on the action they are taking, making their position paper more credible. Uruguay did not do that, but they still provided an extraordinarily strong solution for both of their topics. Narrowing down the lens and being particular about the demographic that they are taking actions for and focusing on raising awareness for the community they are advocating for was the main component I see them utilizing to win the award. Although, after assessing the information, I was able to conclude that all the paragraphs in the position papers are important and crucial to what makes an outstanding position paper. It is also important to recognize and take notice of different paragraphs and how they complement the last. The third paragraph is the most important, as it sums up what the paper is about and gives solutions to the topic. It is important that conciseness, details, and relatability to your assigned country or NGO.

Autoethnography

Fall Semester Preparations.

“NMUN is how I scratch my Speech and Debate itch” was the most accurate quote I have heard that applied to myself. This experience was nothing short of amazing; it provided me with a new atmosphere to learn and excel in. Entering the interview, I was confident that my speech and debate ability would be able to back me up. I have given an extemporaneous speech before.

What caught me by surprise was the impromptu speech of 10 minutes, having to talk at a louder volume and leading people who were there ready to lead was something I have never done before. To my surprise, I was selected to represent Lone Star College in New York this March 2024. Without sacrificing my weekends like how I would with Speech and Debate, I would have to sacrifice some of my Mondays in the fall semester. Students from all Lonestar campuses meet at University Park, attending team meetings to familiarize us with Model UN and how it works as well as discussing position papers. We were then introduced to the coaches and their role on the team. Dr. Howard and Dr. Lambert are the ones mostly in charge of reading and adjusting position papers as well as giving us history lessons on the United Nations and conflicts around the world. On the other hand, Dr. Tiffey and Professor Garcia oversee coaching us on giving speeches and teaching us how the Model UN game operates. I would eventually get assigned to my first partner Bryant to be in the UNESCO committee representing Survival International, an NGO that our school represented alongside with Philippines. Bryant and I had some trouble with getting the position papers done on time, but we got it done in the end.

Spring Semester Preparations.

As spring semester approaches, I am still unfamiliar with everyone else due to not being able to attend the team retreat in Galveston. I deeply regret it to this day, missing the opportunity to bond with these amazing people. We started off by going through each individual day throughout the week and taking notes on what to do throughout those days including excursions all the way to the last of the competition. Our excursions included activities such as visiting the Museum of Modern Arts, Statue of Liberty, St. Patrick's cathedral, and Little Italy. Each coach was split to lead each activity. We were coached going into the first night and we should be prepared to network and gain an estimate on where we can point a meeting place for other

delegates so we could stand out as a leader in the room. Having an idea of which delegation you should be working and forming a group with would be important. Starting with the second day, we should be on track to start drafting our working paper and be prepared to give early game speeches and prepare mid game speeches for the end of the second day and the beginning of the third day. The third day will be the most tiring, as it will have 3 sessions in one day. The main goal of this day is to be able to calm tensions built between people within our working groups. Easing the tension will let us have an easier time not only completing the paper but also keeping people from leaving our group. The last and fourth day should be when you are giving your late game speeches and be ready to vote on resolutions, since I was representing an NGO, I was informed that I am not able to vote. 3 weeks before the conference, I was given notice that my partner Bryant and I will be switched around. Initially, I thought it was something to do with my performance in class but that was not the case. My newly assigned partner name is Gwen, the coaches believed that our chemistry would be better than Bryant and I's. With 3 weeks left before the competition, I need to get to know a stranger and figure out how we can work together well. With such little time, I still felt lost and had no clue or idea what I was doing so there is no time to hesitate on asking questions.

Competition Ready.

March 24th, 2024, I initially thought I would be a lot more nervous walking into the competition because I still had no clue what I was doing. To my surprise, I was not a single ounce nervous walking into my first session that night, if anything, I felt confident with nothing to back up the confidence. I would like to convince myself to this day that it's because of the suits I wore not only in the first session but throughout the competition as well. Wearing the suits

probably reminded me of how much I can depend on myself during speech and debate competitions when things get tough.

“The people who win in life aren’t the one who works the hardest, it’s the ones who knows how to play the game” was something our coach told us. I believe that knowing how to play the game can lead to top, but being genuine on your way there helps you stay at the top. Firmly believing that relational leadership theory is what works best, I implemented it throughout the competition from the very first informal session. Seeing that “leadership as the process by which social systems change through the structuring of roles and relationships”⁴⁰. Instead of being too focused on position papers, when I realized we have some time left in the informal sessions, I tend to use that time to get to know the people that I’ve talked to. This not only would help me get along and having others trust me, but it would also help me to understand their background as well. Making it easy for me to communicate with them in a more interculturally effective way as I recognize the “importance of intercultural sensitivity in the globalizing society”⁴¹. I then gave my agenda speech informing the topics matter to my fellow delegates and proposing the topic order that Gwen and I agreed upon. I also pointed out a space in the room where people can meet us at during my speech to stand out to the dais and make us seem like leaders in the room. Ending the session with one last informal session, the agenda was set to topic 1 then 2 orders. Collaborating with Bryant and Nate (representing the Philippines for Lone Star as Gwen and I represented Survival International for Lone Star) we were able to form a working group. Not forgetting one of the strategies that our coach taught us, Gwen immediately took a group selfie to make people feel more inclined to stay in this working group.

⁴⁰ Uhl-bien p. 668

⁴¹ Chen p. 6

Debrief sessions are one of the most important things that was able to keep me sharp and confident throughout the whole conference. Dr. Tiffey provide us with a checklist for the sessions and at the end of each day to keep us on track of the competition, this allows me to feel like I am on the right track and boosts my confidence for the next day. Allowing Gwen and I to ask questions regarding our next step for the conference played a crucial role for our success. The Coaches also stop by our conference room to watch and record our speeches, this is a good way to give us feedback on the speeches we are giving and how we can improve on it as well. Overall, debrief sessions is just a guidance path to keep us going the right way and I fully believe it contributed a lot to Gwen and I's success throughout the conference.

Day 2 and day 3 are the two toughest days of the competition in my opinion, everyone is still figuring out what is going on and people can potentially leave the working group we created from the first day. Nate has a natural charm to him that makes him an incredible leader within the informal sessions working groups, I wanted to contribute and find my own way of leading. Founded my strength, I utilized public speaking as my way of leading the room and keep Survival International in the conversation between all working groups. Acknowledging that our conference has a very diverse background, I took advantage of Pause and Power and Change of Tempo, two of the many concepts introduced by Carnegie⁴². My ability to “develop emotion towards understanding...cultural differences”⁴³ sets me apart as I understand the importance of not speaking at a fast constant rate but slow down and emphasizes on what matters. Pausing, “enhance the power of this statement”⁴⁴ but also let my audience have the chance to understand

⁴² Dale Carnegie and J. Berg Esenwein, *The Art of Public Speaking: The Original Tool for Improving Public Oration* (New York, New York: Clydesdale Press, 2018).

⁴³ Chen p. 1

⁴⁴ Carnegie p. 56

what I'm implying in my speeches. Pairing it with relational leadership, I would ask Gwen which countries she talked to during informal sessions that would agree upon helping indigenous communities on their clauses and papers. Using that information while forming relationships with our fellow member states "As leadership is shared and created jointly...develop their relationships not just as questions of influence and leadership, but also as questions of how to keep all of this moving and working together."⁴⁵. We gave countries mentions during our speeches allowing us to stay on top of our game. Eventually, people would start acknowledging and calling for action to help indigenous populations in their speech. Survival International would eventually get more mentions in speeches keeping us a name to be talked about throughout the committee. Day 2 and 3 ended with Gwen and I meeting a girl from Japan named Kokona. Kokona didn't speak English very well and was very nervous to give a speech. Gwen mostly helped her with writing the speech itself while Dr. Tiffee helped her with delivery. Although I wasn't much of help, I wanted to help her feel better and talked to her after the day ended. English is my second language as well and acknowledging the "realization of having inadequate competence and feeling high anxiety when communicating in a second or foreign language"⁴⁶, I felt proud, that Kokona has the courage to give a speech here. Using the tiniest bit of Japanese I know; I said "Oyasuminasai" which translates to "goodnight" in Japanese as my way of returning the courage she gave to this committee by speaking English.

The last and fourth day wrapped things up as peer voted awards and resolution voting procedures take place on this day. Carrying on how I felt from the days before, I wouldn't be upset at all if Gwen and I didn't win the Best in Committee award. In my mind, inspiring stories

⁴⁵ Uhl-Bien p. 668

⁴⁶ Wang p. 22

from people like Kokona is what I am here for, and I don't want to put a title or an award on it. I want it to be genuine. We were then announced that we won Best in Committee and Gwen seemed very happy which is good, but regardless of winning it or not, I would've felt just as good. Ending our last session with all the resolutions passed, I was very happy with my committee and is grateful to be able to work with all.

Conclusion

Redefining autoethnography, it is a study that involves the researcher to be in the environment observing⁴⁷. Although, "Moral and ethical questions get stirred to the surface because ethnographers of performance explode the notion of aesthetic distance."⁴⁸ that isn't the case with this autoethnography. I have participated and fully immersed myself in this experience at the National Model United Nations conference in New York, making this autoethnography as intimate and as pure as it gets. Utilizing my strength in public speaking and intercultural communication skills, my partner Gwen and I won the Best in Committee award. Having the Indigenous community's name on 3 out of 4 resolutions passed was truly an accomplishment that made Gwen extremely happy.

I want to give special acknowledgments to Gwendolyn Crain and Nathaniel Victoriano for being amazing second years, guiding my path, and leading my way when I needed help. I truly believe their help greatly contributed to my success at this conference. Lastly, I want to recognize Kokona Uetake's bravery at this conference. It is an inspiration and honor to be able to work with her.

⁴⁷ Dwight Conquergood, Performing as a moral act: Ethical dimensions of the ..., 2003, <http://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/603/PerfasaMoralAct.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Conquergood p. 2

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