

Simulation Training Systems. (2010). Bafa Bafa. Retrieved May 26, 2010 from <http://www.stsintl.com/>

Reviewed by

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An increase in the diversity of our communities calls for recreation, parks, and leisure service professionals to respond by hiring culturally competent staff and by offering programs and services that meet the needs of diverse populations. Bafa Bafa is a cross-culture simulation that is designed to demonstrate the differences between cultures and/or various groups of people. To begin, a group of at least four people, although a minimum of 12 participants is more ideal, is divided into two cultures; the Alpha Culture and the Beta Culture. The two cultures are then given time to learn and practice the traditions and customs of their culture. Next a participant from each culture is selected to go to the other culture and observe the behaviors and actions of the other culture. Each observer is given about two minutes to observe the behaviors and actions of the other culture with the intentions of reporting back to their own culture the observations they made in the opposing culture.

During the rest of the simulation, members of each culture are given the chance to visit the other culture. Unlike the observer, visitors should attempt to successfully interact with members of the other culture, although they are also not to ask questions about the customs or rules of the culture they visit. Upon returning to their original culture, visitors are not to discuss their experience with members of their own culture. After everyone has had a chance to visit the other culture, the two cultures are brought back together for discussion and analysis. Bafa Bafa helps individuals understand how quickly they behave according to their learned culture and how one uses his or her understanding of their own culture to make assumptions about other cultures, and therefore behave in inappropriate, offensive ways toward individuals in other cultures (Simulation Training Systems, 2010). This simulation highlights how being culturally insensitive can lead to unknowingly offensive behaviors toward others.

In order to properly facilitate this learning activity it is suggested that the professor/trainer/employer purchase the Bafa Bafa simulation kit. This kit can be found at www.stsintl.com/schools-charities/bafa.html and purchased with a discount when used for educational purposes. The directions and CD instructions will guide the facilitator. At least two facilitators are needed. It takes about 1½ hour to facilitate Bafa Bafa, however more time is needed for larger groups.

Participants are motivated to rethink how they think and behave towards others from different cultures and are forced to examine their own biases. Finally, participants gain an understanding of how stereotypes are formed and how seemingly neutral behavior can be inappropriate and offensive (Simulation Training Systems, 2010).

One goal of this activity is to assist participants in being able to communicate and interact with people from other cultures in more effective ways, avoiding behaviors such as stereotyping, saying disparaging remarks and demeaning jokes, or using excluding behavior. A second, broader goal is for participants to understand the need for supportive environments where people from diverse backgrounds, races, and cultures can feel safe and valued. This goal can only be achieved if first an individual understands the need to be sensitive to the traditions of other cultures and individuals from cultures/groups unlike our own. Only then does one have the tools to create environments where others are asked to contribute to the healthiness of diverse groups. Speaking from experience, Bafa Bafa is one of the most effective learning activities I have ever participated in or facilitated.

Bafa Bafa can be used in the field of recreation, parks, and leisure services in a variety of ways. First, this simulation can be used effectively in classes such as introduction classes, leadership classes, and classes on diversity. This simulation creates teachable moments that can complement readings and lectures on diversity, inclusion and the need for the field of recreation, parks, and leisure services to embrace all individuals in their communities and provide equal recreational opportunities for everyone. This simulation can help students better understand their own actions and how they affect people of other groups. Second, this simulation can be highly effective when used during orientation and in-service training with employees. Bafa Bafa can highlight how when professionals in the field don't know all the traditions and customs of groups they interact with, they can offend, exclude and create barriers that are otherwise easily removed.