

## Application of Classical Games in Class

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**Abstract** Playing proper games in the class could help to activate students and enhance their study interest. Proper classical games could even increase the lecturing effectiveness as they can show the target lecturing principles. By summarizing up the author's own experience of adapting charade in the lecturing of communication principle of management, this paper argues that game play a positive role in improving class effectiveness, and further proposes that proper games ought to be adapted to the class of many courses in the university.

**Key words** Charade; Classical games; Application

### 1 Introduction

Game reflects real living, and its entertainment comes from the humorous amplification of basic principles. These principles, which are supported to be strict and serious, are looked so close to reality in game playing, therefore are easily understood and applied by the students in the class.

Many articles published on the application of game in class in China, but most of them are focused on primary and middle school teaching than on that of university level. The countable articles topic on university teaching, focused mainly on language and physical education. According to these articles, game playing in the class will help to create a learning environment, foster and enhance students' interest and absorptive feeling of study (Wang Fang, 2008, Shen Shuxia, 2008); further searches argued that by playing games would help the transferring of learning motives (Zhong Fajuan, 2008).

Articles on game playing in other courses are rarely seen, limited available papers are found about courses study of health psychology, architecture mechanism and management. These articles argued that by playing games in the class, a relaxing and free environment is created, and knowledge is embodied into entertainment (Qu Guangwei, 2008). They admit the function of game playing in college class, emphasize that game playing should go with syllabus, and contain knowledge from textbook. And the goal of game playing should be to help college students understanding the key points, enhance their ability to apply theory (Liu Wei, 2007). All the games discussed in these articles are those designed by the instructor, aiming to activate class and motivate learning desire.

Robbins said that one of the reasons why one should study management is that he will either manage or be managed. Management is listed as a primary or fundamental course in many Chinese universities as it is so important that its application of principles could be seen from personal life, enterprise operation and government administration. The omnipresent management principles provide us opportunities to use well-designed or classical games in demonstrating them in the class, for example, charade could be played in the class about "communication".

Charade is a word guessing game. The most popular form of the game is an acting one, in which the first player acts out a word or phrase which was secretly demonstrated to him/her by the director/instructor, often by pantomiming similar-sounding words, and the other players guess the word or phrase. The idea is to use physical rather than verbal language to convey the meaning to another party (Wikipedia).

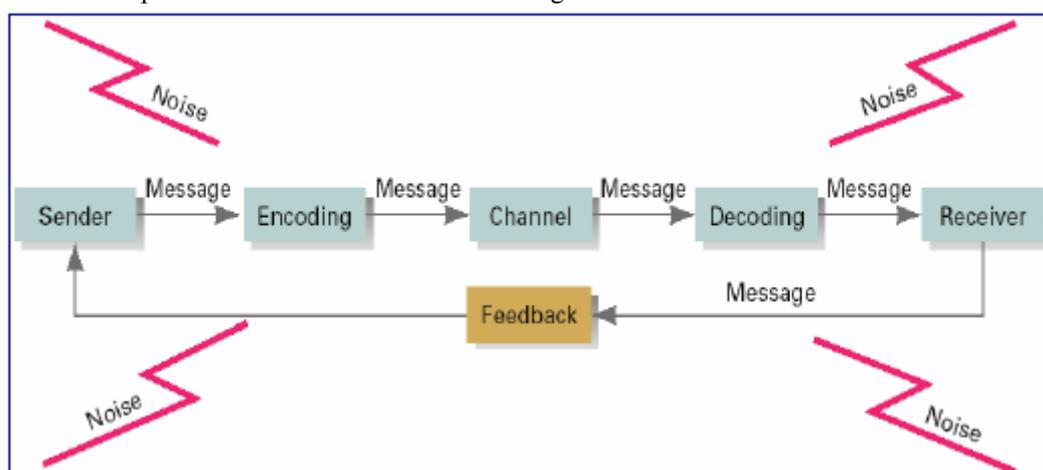
In China, Charade is popularized as "Identical Action Copy, (IAC)", in which a group of members participate the "action copy", and verbal language is forbidden. At the beginning of IAC, all the members of a playing group (generally 5-7 persons) are asked to stand in a row, and back to the instructor. To start the game, the instructor asks the first member to turn around and shows him the paper board on which the word or phrase is printed, and then the first member asks the second member to turn around, and show him/her a series of action which is in fact the translation the word of phrase into physical movements. The second member is asked to copy the action he/she has seen from the first member identically to the third member by asking him turn round. The same sub-process is repeated again and again, and it is the last member's duty to speak out what the original word or phrase was loudly according to his/her understanding of the former member's action which is imitated from the next former member. During the game, verbal is forbidden, but the participators could use instruments they can find to emphasize their action. Since most of the players could not imitate the former player's action identically and completely, the actions created by the first player are distorted gradually as the game

proceeding, and most probably, the last player could not give the right answer. The playing process is full of fun.

As university teachers, the authors have arranged the students to play charade for 4 times when teaching the communication part of management of charade and communication.

## 2 Communication

Communication is the process of transferring and understanding of meaning (Robbins) . All managers do involve communication. An effective communication could not guarantee an effective management, but an ineffective communication is always one source of problem. A complete communication process could be demonstrated as in figure 1.



Adapted from: Stephen Robbins, Fundamentals of Management, 4th edition, Peking University Press, 2006,4:340

**Figure 1 Communication Process**

According to Robbins, the communication process goes in an environment full of noise, the external factors which affect communication. The process consisted of a route, a channel, two ends and three sub-processes. The route is the follow of information, the channel is the vehicle that conveys the meaning, the two ends are the sender and receiver of meaning, and the sub-processes are encoding, decoding and feedback. An effective communication comes from the synergy of above-mentioned factors, of which information is the outlook of meaning in the form of language, character, picture, and gesture, etc. During the communication process, the understandability of meaning is influenced by meaning, external form of meaning and their combination; encoding refers to the translation of meaning into information while decoding refers to the reversion; both of encoding and decoding are affected by (encoding/decoding) skill/technique, attitude, knowledge and culture; the distance and formality of channel also place impact on the convey of information; while feedback is to check about the effectiveness of meaning transportation, which is the receiver’s understandability to the meaning.

## 3 Brief Description of Charade Playing in the Class

In 2007 and 2008, for several times, the authors organized students to play charade in the class when taught about the chapter of “communication”. Totally 36 students were selected to form 6 groups, and each group had 5-7 members. Of these groups, 3 were consisted of Chinese only and 3 had one German student members each, as shown in table 1.

**Table 1 Grouping**

Class	Group	Members	Note
1	1	5	Chinese Students
	2	6	
	3	7	
2	4	5	The third member is a German Student
	5	6	
	6	7	

The results of game playing were amusing, of all the 6 groups of player, no one had spoken out the

original words or phrase, and the closest answer one group given was a similar pronunciation phrase. See table 2.

**Table 2 Results of Game**

Group	Original word or phrase	Answers Given	Some Clues
1	wind	blow	
2	gale	dance	
3	typhoon	fly	
4	water	mineral water	The first student used a bottle of mineral water as an instrument.
5	flood	red water	The first student used a bottle of water and a red pencil bag as instruments
6	deluge	tape water	The second student wrote 1998 by gesture

During the playing, the rest of the students kept guffawing, and some of them whispering the correct word or phrase of their understanding to the playing groups. After game, the instructor held discussion in the class, and the topic was: how to communicate effectively.

## 4 Charade and Communication

### 4.1 Charade and communication

Charade reflects a typical communication process. By playing charade, the students would have a vivid idea and a deep understanding of communication process and its barrages.

First, the level of meaning complexity requires equivalent encoding and decoding skills in the process. Generally speaking, simple and concrete meaning could be easily communicated due to easy encoding and decoding, while complex and abstract meaning could not be easily communicated due to difficult encoding and decoding. In our games, the words/phrase required to be communicated is difficult to be encoded, and the difficulty level upgraded one by one, that ought to be one of the main reasons why the groups could not speak out the correct answer. Suppose a phrase like “七上八下”(upset, surface meaning of the four Chinese characters is 7 up and 8 down) was given to one group, the possibility of correctly understand the meaning would be greatly increased, as the members could easily encode the meaning into simple hand movement as put seven figures upward first and then eight figures downward. From this point, we can say that it is quite important to simplify our meaning from the start of communication.

Second, encoding and decoding play a key role in a success communication, and they are influenced by technique/skill, attitude, knowledge and social culture. In charade game we played, encoding is the process that the first member of each group translated the word/phrase into his/her own physical actions, while decoding is the process that the last member reverted the former member's imitated action to word/phrase. (1) Obviously, adroit and abundant body movements could help one to translate the original meaning into action precisely; even so, one should base his decoding on the receiver's ability to imitating and decoding. The core of decoding here is to correctly convey the meaning by actions as simple as possible. (You can argue that the simplest decoding method to read the word/phrase, or encoding the original message into language, but remember that verbal is forbidden in the game. Your argument exactly explains that simple decoding could improve communication efficiency). (2) Our attitude influences our behavior. If a member didn't take the game playing seriously, or observed the former student's action carelessly, or had not done his best to imitate the former member's action, he would properly copy the action. Especially, when the next member has a different understanding of the former member's action, he will adjust the action which he would show to the next member according to his own understanding. The adjustment will definitely distort the original encoding. (3) Our knowledge about the meaning and the expression the meaning, and our social background will also influence communication. For example, to illustrate the phrase of “洪水” (flood), the first member of group 5 gestured Chinese character “九八” (98) to the second member in order to hint the phrase he had seen from the instructor. Unfortunately, the third member of group 5 was a German student who had neither known the two Chinese characters nor the idea that there had been a flood in Yangtze River area in 1998, and he had to copy the second member's action difficultly. No doubt that a wrong answer of “tap water” was given finally. From this point, we could conclude that simple decoding such as using simple words and language is critic for effective communication besides a good preparation and sufficient knowledge of background.

Third, the distance and formality of channel will influence the sustaining of effective information, as in the case of tap water and power supply, the longer of transmit distance, the bigger of the loss; the more of informality, the bigger of distortion. Class charade playing told us that the groups with fewer members did a little better than those with more members. (Of course, if for entertaining, more members in one group will bring more fun). The transmission of action from the first member to the next to the last member is almost the same case as a direction from the top level to the primary level in an organization hierarchy. The whole communication process is divided into several sub-process of communication, and the transmission of a same direction from an upper level to its subordinate is a complete communication process. The meaning to be conveyed in each sub-process is required to be identical with the entire process, but has in fact has some distortion which might come from the different understanding to the communicating meaning by both of information sender and receiver. Hence we can say that reduce middle levels or shorten the channel will increase communication efficiency.

Fourth, identification and usage of feedback could help to correct communication differentials. In the game, when the former student was acting, he was also considering if his follower could understand the action and the supposed meaning to be conveyed by watching the later student's facial expression. Facial expression is exactly the feedback in our game. By using feedback, the former student would always repeat his action, emphasize some piece of action so as to emphasize the meaning, till the follower seems like that he was understood. Therefore, we could say that paying attention to feedback and rectify any derivation is very important to keep communication effective.

#### **4.2 Charade and communication barriers**

Charade playing also telling us how does communication barriers as filtering, selective perception, information overload and language work, and their effect on communication.

Information filtering refers to manipulating information so that it will be seen more favorably by the receiver (Robbins). The more sections information travels, the more filtering, and therefore the more information distortion. Our game playing shows this principle vividly. When the former student observed that puzzles were written on the face of his follower, he would repeat or even adjust his action so as to make it "understandable" to the follower. He forgot that all the middle members in the row was only a part of the channel, exactly imitating or copying the action was more important than understanding the action in the game. Unfortunately, all the members in a game did the same and repeated the same mistake. No doubt that the original meaning being recovered totally different, "flood" was changed into "tap water" after transmission. We can see the same situation in an organization, the more levels in the hierarchy, the more information filtering during both upward or downward meaning transmission, and the more meaning distortion.

With selective perception, receivers see and hear based on their needs, motivations, experience, background, and other personal characteristics (Robbins), therefore they in fact see and hear only a part of the conveying information instead of entire picture. Partial is being focused and amplified, while the rest is being neglected, like the elephant perceived by different blind men in an India story. In our game, when a follower thought that he had understood some of or part of the former action, he would think that he had gotten the answer and might adjust the action according to his understanding when he acted to his follower, neglected or blurred the action he had no idea of. The result, of course, was that the original meaning missed. We could think that the result should be better if each member just copies the action of a former member than if he adjusts the action according to his understanding to his follower. Conclusion: do not believe your receiver has completely understood the meaning except that we have a positive feedback.

Selective perception is related to information overload, or in other words, information overload is a source of selective perception. When information is more than one's capability to handle, he will remember some of the information which he thought useful and forget or neglect the rest. In the game, the first member is always trying his best by all means he can take advantage of within the rules limitation to demonstrate the word or phrase he had seen from the instructor; therefore, great deal of information appeared before the second member. The second member has no idea of the core and imitated the simple action or "understandable" action to his follower. Surely information would be distorted gradually in the game. We concluded that: to build an effective communication, we should simplify our language, use jargon or professional terms selectively by whom our receiver is.

Channel selection will also bring communication barriers. Obviously, we could attribute the reason why it is so difficulty for each group to give the correct answer to the game rule which forbid verbal usage. If language could be used in the game, all Chinese students groups will have almost no communication barriers, as the members could read the original word or phrase to their followers; while

those groups with German students would also have few barriers, as German students could imitate Chinese pronunciation to their followers. We must emphasize that when language is permitted, if a former student try to communicate the meaning by using the receiver's familiar language, for example English or Germany, so as to favor the receiver, he will commit a mistake of information filtering. Because by doing so, additional section is added and the channel distance is prolonged, as the meaning in different language could have different sayings. Therefore, we can say that: face to face verbal communication is the most efficiency one, and when using verbal communication, we should confirm that the two parties of communication have the same understanding to the words or phrase which are used in communication.

## 5 Conclusion

A teacher uses means to convey knowledge, and game playing is a good mean. In our class, charade playing provides the students with an interesting platform on which they can study the principles of communication by participating game and interacting with other students besides the traditional learning strategy as being taught and reading. Students admitted such a teaching strategy, and said that they had deep impression of the class. Playing charade in the class obviously increased teaching efficiency.

According to Howard Gardner, Kolb and Neil Fleming, different students are endowed with different type of intelligence; different students have different learning style. Playing game in the class integrates different ways of information perception of the students, allows the students to learn and understand not only by listening, but also by watching, reading and participating, hence inspires their potential intelligence (Hui Fengting, Lu Jiuqin, 2007). We suggest that playing well selected games in the class could help teaching as well as learning for many college courses, and we are also looking forward to reading more about game playing studies in university classes.

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