Getting Your Ducks in a Row Activity Plan

An in-class activity for introductory anthropology courses. The activity can be adapted for synchronous on-line learning, but is designed for in-class environments.

Time: Approximately 20-30 minutes

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, students should be able to:

- name several classmates;
- define typology; and
- describe at least one strength and weakness of typologies at an introductory level.

Required supplies

- One rubber duck (or other object) per student participant, distributed at the beginning of class
- Slideshow for instructions
- Online or printed worksheet

Note: Any object can serve so long as there is some variation. Limited space and budget? Consider stickers. Alternatively, students could be asked to bring something from home, such as dice, a piece of cutlery, or a pen.

Steps

Begin with a micro-lecture on typology before having students engage in the tasks below. Important: try not to foreshadow the problems yet. Part of the objective is for students to spot the difficulties by attempting to create their own typology. The collaborative or hybrid version of the worksheet can be used to guide students through the tasks alongside the slides.

The tasks are presented on slides and verbally as follows:

Slide 1: Examine your duck. Make notes about its defining characteristics. Try to engage multiple senses as you do so. (2 minutes)

Slide 2: Get out of your seat and take your duck. Form a group of 8-12 people. Introduce yourself and your duck. Come up with a team name. (2 minutes)

Slide 3: Sort your ducks into types. As a team, you need to define which categories will be meaningful and why. Think about the defining characteristics and aim for consensus. You can have as many or as few types as you like. Types may consist of single ducks. You might have outliers too. Jot down key words to describe each type. Take photos of your types. (5-10 minutes)

Slide 4: Go look at two other teams' typologies and take photos. How well does your typology match theirs? What is the same? What is different? How would your typology change if you combined those ducks with your own? (5 minutes)

End the activity, or begin the next session, with a review discussion that highlights common answers and reviews some of the examples of how and when typologies can be useful and how they can become problematic.

Worksheets

The hybrid version of the worksheet is available on Google forms: https://forms.gle/m3xr1j5t9jeuyVjQA

If I am doing a fully collaborative or fully individual version of the worksheet, instead of having a second element on LMS, I add the following questions at the end:

1. Based on this exercise, try to come to a consensus as to which of the following statements is **most accurate**. (Hint: There are two possible answers here. You only need to pick one of them.)
    a. Typologies are excellent tools to objectively classify things, people, and ideas.
    b. Typologies are so subjective that they can never be useful as a tool.
    c. Typologies are based on observable traits and are sometimes useful for classification systems.
    d. Typologies can be useful, but cannot account for all variations. Use with caution.
    e. Typologies are useful for objects, but classification systems can't work for ideas.

2. Justify your choice for the previous question in 1-2 sentences.

The hybrid worksheet is useful if there is no easy way to connect student responses from the online form to your Learning Management System (LMS). The same can be said of the individual sheet. If you have a tool that streamlines student group creation AND links directly to your LMS, this would be the ideal option as it keeps the conversation entirely within the group.

Grading

I have used a variety of grading options requiring varying degrees of labour. The easiest is a simple participation mark (i.e. 1 mark for submitting any kind of answers). I have also used simple scales like exceeds expectations, meets expectations, does not meet expectations, followed by examples of good responses for students to compare their own work against. The most time consuming option is to individually grade each response. It can be valuable, but is not necessary for a low-stakes activity like this.