

Creativity in Culture Classes

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1 Introduction

In the teaching of culture, there are three pedagogical elements to consider: the contents of the topic, the instructional method of teaching the contents, and the learning styles of the students.

The contents of the topic can be decided by the teacher, or may be determined by the teaching materials; in most cases, that would be the contents of the textbook. If a textbook is used, the teacher can select which units or topics to teach.

The instructional method of teaching culture depends on the type of course and the desired outcome. If the class is a seminar in culture, then an academic approach that stresses the accumulation of knowledge may be the most appropriate instructional method. Such a method stresses acquiring knowledge primarily through readings and lectures and demonstrating the knowledge acquisition through tests, written essays, and research papers. If the class is a language skills class, the appropriate instructional style may include a combination of short readings with comprehension questions, multimedia listening to a variety of people describing their own cultural experiences, and pair and small group discussion activities.

The third element in the teaching of culture is the students' learning styles. It is first necessary to know the learning styles of the students. Reid (1987), in a study of a variety of international students' learning styles, gave the following as the results for Japanese students' learning styles:

Language	Learning Styles			
Japanese	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Tactile
	12.52	12.67	13.29	13.32

Table 1 Learning Style Preferences of Japanese Students (Reid, 1987, p.96)

The results seem to indicate that students prefer or are better at kinesthetic (involving movement) and tactile (having to do with the sense of touch) ways of learning than the traditional visual (reading) and auditory (lecture) ways of learning.

For the purposes of this paper, it will be assumed that a culture class will be taught using a popular culture textbook that takes an English language skills approach. This paper introduces a creative kinesthetic and tactile approach to the teaching of culture.

2 Materials

The textbook selected for this imaginary culture class is *Identity* (Vilina, et al., 2004a). The authors of the textbook identify the purpose of the textbook: "*Identity* prepares students for intercultural communication-or, more simply, using English to get to know people from other cultures" (Vilina et al., 2004b, p. v). That is, the textbook is an English language skills textbook about cultures from the around the world as the topics of the oral communication. The book includes the following units with the following topics:

UNIT	TITLE	TOPICS
1	Identity	Personal Identity, Cultural Identity
2	Values	Personal Values, Lifestyle Values, Family Values, Cultural Values
3	Culture Shock	Culture Shock Abroad, Culture Shock at Home, How to Reduce Culture Shock
4	Culture in Language	Relationship between Language and Culture, Proverbs

5	Body Language and Customs	Body Language Around the World, Body Language and Customs
6	Individualism	Individualism vs. Collectivism at the Personal Level, at the Cultural Level
7	Politeness	Politeness, Manners, People You Respect
8	Communication Styles	Communication Style Differences between Men and Women, between People from Different Cultures
9	Gender and Culture	Gender Roles within and across Cultures
10	Diversity	Cultural Diversity: Ethnic, Religious, Age, Regional, Gender
11	Social Change	Positive and Negative Aspects of Social Change
12	Global Community	Relationships across Borders and Cultures

Table 2 Unit Titles and Topics in *Identity* (Vilina et al., 2004a)

In addition, an A4-size scrapbook or a B4-size sketchbook would be used by the students. Scrapbooks have been used in the author's oral communication classes successfully for over ten years (Kluge & Taylor, 2010). Which of these, scrapbook or sketchbook, would be used in the class can be decided by the teacher.

3 Procedure

This is the procedure for the activities of the course. The teacher assigns a creative project as homework. The project can be used for two classroom activities and for evaluation. These activities are described below.

3.1 Main Project as Homework

Students are instructed to use an A4-sized scrapbook or a B4-sized sketchbook, as decided by the teacher. If students are asked to use a scrapbook, they can be asked to use two facing pages of the scrapbook for each assignment. If

students are required to use a sketchbook, they can be asked to use the front of one page for each assignment. For each homework assignment, students are asked to use text (words, phrases, sentences), illustrations (created by self or found in pamphlets, magazines, or on the Internet), and photos to create a collage or montage portraying their personal interpretation of the topic or question of the assignment. Assignments are on the topic of the unit and require students to relate the topic to their own lives. This assignment is in addition to the reading, listening, and speaking activities found in the book. The following are suggestions of the type of assignments that can be given.

For Unit 1, titled Identity, which includes the topics of personal identity and cultural identity, students can be asked to create a collage or montage titled, "Who am I?" Depending on the level of the students, a more detailed explanation of what students can include, such as name, hometown, hobbies, likes, and personality characteristics can be given.

For Unit 2 Values, which includes the topics of personal values, lifestyle values, family values, and cultural values, the assignment could be "What I Value in My Life." It could be explained that values are different from likes, which were a part of the Unit 1 assignment. In the case of values, students are asked to think about the things that guide the way they live their lives and help them to make important life decisions. In this case, as in all cases below, examples can and should be given, such as friendship, family ties, and qualities like honesty, compassion, etc.

For Unit 3 Culture Shock, which includes the topics of culture shock abroad, culture shock in the home country, and ways to reduce culture shock, students are asked to create a collage or montage on the topic of "My Culture Shock." As it cannot be assumed that all students in the class have traveled abroad, it can be explained that culture shock can also be experienced in their home countries when they move to a different city or when they change from high school to university.

For Unit 4 Culture in Language, which includes the topics of relationship between language and culture, and proverbs, students can be asked to create a collage/montage on the topic of their favorite proverb in their own language, translate it into English, and explain what the proverb means and when it

would be used. An alternate assignment could be to ask students to write their name in Chinese characters, then translate each character into English, and explain what the meaning of the name says about their parents' hopes for their child. This assignment could have the added benefit of having the students interview their parents to find out why they chose the name they did for their child.

For Unit 5 Body Language and Customs, which includes the topics of body language around the world, and body language and customs, students could create a collage/montage on their favorite body language. This could be a body language in their own country or in English-speaking countries.

For Unit 6 Individualism, which includes the topics of individualism versus collectivism at the personal level and at the cultural level, students could create a collage/montage that explains whether they are individualists or collectivists (groupists), or to what extent they are individualists or collectivists.

For Unit 7 Politeness, which includes the topics of politeness, manners, and the people you respect, students could be asked to create a collage/montage on the topic, "My Pet Peeve," describing the impolite or bad manners that annoys them the most. An alternate assignment could be "the Person I Respect the Most." It can be pointed out that the person could be famous or not.

For Unit 8 Communication Styles, which includes the topics of communication style differences between men and women, and communication style differences between people from different cultures, student could be asked to choose two people (one could be the student) and compare the way the two people communicate. Students would be asked to create a collage/montage illustrating both the similarities and the differences in communication styles.

For Unit 9 Gender and Culture, which includes the topics of gender roles within a culture and across cultures, students could be asked to create a collage/montage on a gender problem they have experienced.

For Unit 10 Diversity, which includes the topics of cultural diversity at the ethnic, religious, age, regional, and/or gender levels, students could be asked to create a collage/montage on a time or place where they really noticed cultural diversity.

For Unit 11 Social Change, which includes the topics of positive and negative

aspects of social change, students could be asked to create a collage/montage explaining why they think society is better now or in the past. Students could be asked to describe a social change and show whether it is a positive or negative social change. Students could also be given the choice of showing both the positive and negative aspects of a particular social change they select. An alternative topic would be to ask students to imagine a change that would improve their society.

For Unit 12 Global Community, which includes the topics of relationships across borders and cultures, students could be asked to create a collage/montage on how they can become a member of the global community.

The above are only examples of creative assignments. Both teachers and students could work together to come up with topics that would be appropriate to the topic and interesting to the students. In the process of creating their collage/montage, students are first exploring how they think or feel about the topic, then thinking about the best way to graphically explain their thoughts and feelings, including the use of words, phrases, and sentences in the target language, and finally they create their artwork. Students go through the process of connecting the culture topic to their own lives.

3.2 Class Activity 1: Presentation

Now that the students have completed their artwork, it is time to use the artwork for oral language practice. Students can be asked to prepare an oral presentation of their artwork. A particular format could be recommended, such as the beginning, middle, and end described below:

Beginning: "Hello everybody! Let me tell you about (topic)."

Middle: (*Explain your artwork.*)

End: "Are there any questions?" (*Answer the questions.*) "Thank you."

Students could first practice it in class by themselves. Then, in groups of three, four, or five, students could give their presentations to the group using their artwork to illustrate their talk. Students could be asked to stand up while giving the presentation. The other members of the group could practice their

backchanneling, or verbal responses, as in the exchange below:

Presenter: Hello everybody!

Group members: Hi!

Presenter: Let me tell you about (topic).

Group members: Okay!

Presenter: (*Explains artwork.*)

Group members: I see./Me, too!/Sounds interesting/difficult/nice/etc. !

Presenter: Are there any questions?

Group members: (*Asks questions.*)

Presenter: (*Answer the questions.*)

Presenter: (*When there are no more questions*) Thank you.

The teacher may insist that each student in the group ask a question of each presenter. Teachers can assist students in the question making by giving them some examples. A general set of question patterns, like 5Ws + H (What, When, Where, Who, Why, and How) might help. The addition of "D" (Do) to the above general set of question patterns increases the productivity of the set (e.g., Do you __?, Do you have ____?, Do you want ___?, etc.).

The activity is finished when all members of all groups are sitting down. Alternately, a time limit for each speaker could be set by the teacher.

3.3 Class Activity 2: Gallery

A second class activity, called Gallery, could be done with the scrapbooks/-sketchbooks. In Gallery, students pretend they are in an art gallery. The artwork is the students' artwork for the unit. All of the students open their scrapbooks/sketchbooks to the page of the assignment, and leave them open on their desks so that people walking by can see the pages easily. Students walk around the class in groups of two or three. As they look at the artwork, they make comments to each other in English, like, "Look at that!" "Neat!" "Cute!" "What's that?" "What do you think of this?" or "That's a neat idea!" These kinds of phrases could be introduced to the students. Students should be reminded that they should stay in English while walking around the gallery.

The activity could end when all the students make a round of the gallery and then sit down in their seats, or the teacher can set a time limit.

The Gallery activity allows all the students to see all of the students' artwork. In addition to allowing students to learn more about what all their classmates think about the topic, it gives students an idea of how much effort other students are putting into their projects, and gives them ideas of things they can do in their own assignments.

3.4 Evaluation Activity

The scrapbooks/sketchbooks can also be used for evaluation. In addition to asking students to evaluate their own pages, students can give their presentation to the whole class for a grade. The same language that was used in Activity 1 could be used. Either this could be done with each unit, or students could be asked to select two assignments and present them periodically as midterm or final exams. If students present two assignments, the language used could be modified:

Presenter: Hello everybody!

Group members: Hi!

Presenter: Let me tell you about (topic 1) and (topic 2).

Group members: Okay!

Presenter: (*Explains artwork for two topics.*)

Group members: (*backchanneling optional*) I see./Me, too!/Sounds interesting/difficult/nice/etc. !

Presenter: (*asking for questions optional*) Are there any questions?

Group members: (*asking questions optional*) (*Asks questions.*)

Presenter: (*answering questions optional*) (*Answer the questions.*)

Presenter: (*When there are no more questions*) Thank you.

4 Adding Technology

Technology could be used as an alternative to the activity. Digital projects could replace physical scrapbooks or sketchbooks. Technology can also be used for self evaluation purposes.

4.1 Technological Alternative to the Activity

This same activity could be done with computers, with some modification and some advantages and disadvantages over the system described above. The advantages are students are generally used to using computers to create assignments, and the final project looks very slick. The disadvantages are classes would have to be held in computer rooms, and there are always technical problems when using computers. Perhaps a greater disadvantage is the class dynamics are different in a typical computer room in that the technology often makes it difficult for students to create cohesive groups. They are separated physically by the machines and perhaps also by the actual mediation of the technology. This may change with different physical layouts of computer rooms and the spread of the use of portable multimedia tablets such as the iPad. Doing the activity with computers may reduce the kinesthetic and tactile learning style components of the activity.

4.2 Technological Self Improvement

As an optional added element, technology can be used for student presentation self improvement. Students can be asked to bring a digital camera or cell phone to class. For everyday activities, students can record their presentations using the movie function of the digital camera or cell phone, view them as homework, and then evaluate themselves, using a system such as the SELLS system described below. The author's SELLS system is an easy and effective presentation evaluation system. SELLS stands for Smooth, Energy, Loud, Look, and Smile. Smooth means the speaker should speak smoothly, but should not read the presentation. This requires sufficient practice. Energy means the speaker should speak enthusiastically about the topic. Loud means the speaker should speak loudly enough for all the audience to hear clearly. Look means the speaker should maintain good eye contact. Finally, Smile means the speaker should start with a smile, and should smile throughout the presentation. Teachers can ask students to hand in their evaluations.

In the case of testing, if there is time for a practice test the class before the exam day, students can record each other performing the presentation. The

speaker gives his or her digital camera or cell phone to a partner. The partner records the presentation and gives the camera or phone back to the owner. The owner has to watch and listen to the presentation and write an evaluation. This way, the speaker gets feedback to improve the presentation before the exam, and not afterwards, as is usual with such evaluations. The feedback is unbiased (an actual recording) and the conclusions from the feedback are more apt to be implemented as the students give advice to themselves. The student both learns how to improve the presentation and receives a better grade because of learning how to improve the presentation. The evaluations can be done on paper or emailed to the teacher.

4 Conclusion

By adding the element of creativity to culture classes, the teacher taps into one or two of the major learning styles of Japanese students (kinesthetic and/or tactile), and students find another way to communicate to others what they have learned about the topic of the unit, and what they personally think and feel about the topic. Not only does this make the topic more interesting for the class, it also gives students good practice in giving presentations using posters. In addition, students have a concrete record of what they thought at this point in their life that can serve as a memento of the class.

References

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