

Seeding Change: Intercultural Learning in the Classroom

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Reference Data:

Strong, G., Dujmovich, J., McLaughlin, R., & O'Dowd, G. (2012). Seeding Change: Intercultural Learning in the Classroom. In A. Stewart & N. Sonda (Eds.), *JALT2011 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

This paper describes several classroom tasks for developing intercultural communicative competence among students. One task employs metaphor to help students analyze cultural differences and to categorize and analyze different cultures. A second task employs postcards to aid students in becoming more perceptive observers of cultural diversity. A third task has students compare cultures on a global happiness index to foster student interest in other cultures and to reflect on their own criteria for happiness. A final task engages students in global health issues in order to enlarge their appreciation of the inter-connectedness of Japan and the world.

本稿では、教室における学生達の異文化学習と異文化コミュニケーションの理解を促進するための、全員参加型公開討論形式で行われる作業について報告する。まず、文化の違いを検討する学生達の手助けとなるよう、二つの文化から類似した表現方法を用いて、その中で学生達が異文化について分類、分析し、考察する。次に、絵葉書を用いて、文化的多様性に関する優れた観察者となるよう学生達の補助をする。さらに、他の国々の文化について学生たちの興味を育てるため、また、彼ら自身の幸福の尺度を熟考するため、世界幸福度指数による異文化比較を行う。最後に、学生の日本と世界の相互関連性について正しい理解をより広げるため、世界の健康問題に焦点を当てる。

THE TASKS described here were presented in a forum at the JALT 2011 Conference in order to aid teachers in improving their students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as well as their English language skills. Fantini (2012) defines ICC in part as "the complex of the abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (para 4).

One aspect of ICC is an awareness of the differences between one's own culture and other cultures. Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, and Street (2001) contend that intercultural communication "is always a cultural process and that communication in a foreign (and in some contexts, a second) language involves mediating and establishing relationships between one's own and other cultures" (p.7). Furthermore, they argue that language learning should not focus on the goal of becoming a native or near-native speaker. Instead, they suggest that a more realistic and appropriate aspiration for language learners is a better appreciation of the differences between their cultural behaviors and those of others.

In language learning, ICC has been addressed through different types of culture studies. These consist of examining literature and texts through discourse analysis; learning specific



areas of content instruction related to work, life, and study; taking anthropological or ethnographic approaches towards studying daily life in another culture; preparing for study abroad; and finally, combining communicative language teaching with cultural awareness (Roberts, et. al, 2001, p.27-28). The latter approach is the one undertaken here. Numerous examples can be found of authors presenting classroom tasks and activities to sensitize students to cultural differences (Corbett, 2010; Fantini, 1997; Stringer & Cassiday, 2009). Acquiring ICC in the classroom involves students in exploring their own ethnocentricity, their cultural values and symbols, their stereotypes, and their respective worldviews through cross-cultural comparisons and through global indexes on national happiness and health.

The tasks described here were developed to teach students with a wide range of abilities learning in different educational contexts. The tasks also promote effective language learning in that students find their lessons interesting and do much of their work in small groups. We hope that other teachers can make use of the resources that this article identifies and adapt the tasks to fit their own classrooms. In the sections that follow, we present a task using a metaphor to teach students about cultural differences, one in which postcards are used to introduce the intercultural theme, another in which an international happiness index leads to the theme of intercultural communication, and finally, a task in which students compare health issues around the world.

Employing Metaphor to Help Students Analyze Cultural Differences

Gregory Strong

Writers on intercultural communication argue that ICC should be an essential goal of language teaching because of its role in assisting people to understand cultures different from their own (Roberts, et al., 2001). The following task forms part of an

intercultural communications class for third- and fourth-year university students. It was derived from Chapter 2 of *Understanding Intercultural Communication* (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2004) in which the authors suggest that the culture of a country can be described in terms of an iceberg metaphor. Most of an iceberg is hidden from view (beneath the ocean). According to the authors, the same is true about a culture. Popular images and stereotypes of a given country are easily noted. However, the country's symbols, traditions, and beliefs are not so readily apparent (see Figure 1).

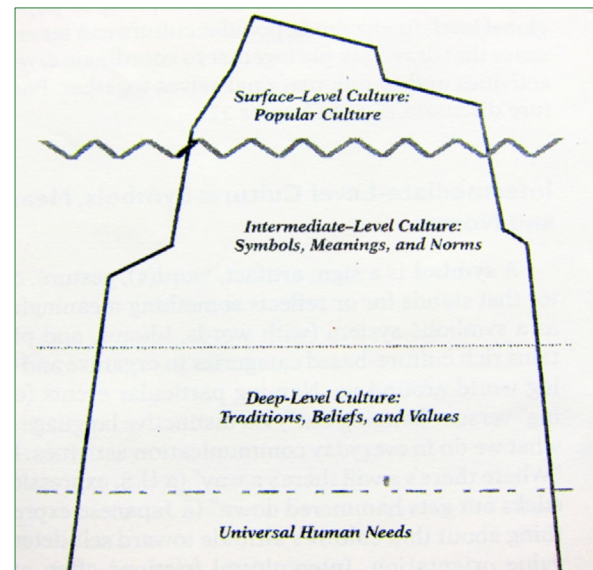


Figure 1. The Iceberg Metaphor for Culture (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2004, p. 28, by permission of Oxford University Press Inc.)

The authors' iceberg metaphor consists of four different levels. The first level of a culture is the "surface level" apparent to even casual observers. It consists of cultural stereotypes often based on popular music and other media images. To achieve a deeper understanding of the culture, one must look at the second, or "intermediate level," that of cultural symbols and typical behaviors. For example, one Japanese symbol is Mount Fuji with its suggestion of strong cultural ties to nature, and to natural forces such as volcanoes, and earthquakes. In addition, in terms of the intermediate level, a typical behavior or social norm in Japanese culture is that of bowing to others. The third level of a culture in the iceberg metaphor is the "deep level," consisting of traditions, beliefs, and world view. For example, Japan has a polytheistic religion, Shinto, and its doctrines refer to 8 million *kami*, divinities that are innumerable, including natural forces such as the wind or thunder, but also consisting of Japanese heroes and rulers. The fourth level of a culture consists of "universal human needs" such as food and shelter. Common to all cultures, these needs find different expressions according to cultural traditions, geography, and climate. For example, the cereal grain wheat is eaten in Japan as noodles, while in the United States, it is usually consumed in the form of bread.

The aim of the following activities is to introduce the concept of culture as an iceberg, multi-layered, and with values and symbols that are not easily observed. Later in class, students illustrate the concept through creating an iceberg diagram for a particular country and then explaining it to their classmates.

Procedure: Class I

1. The teacher introduces the concept of the iceberg metaphor to the class. Scenes from DVDs are used to illustrate each level of the iceberg. Many popular films or TV programs show the stereotypes found at the surface level of culture. For example, the comedy *Gung Ho* (Mandel, Blum, Lloyd,

& Ganz, 1986) about a Japanese car manufacturer purchasing an American car manufacturing plant exploits many stereotypes of the two cultures.

2. Showing short DVD sequences in class, the teacher can ask students to list stereotypes, compare their lists with one another, and then go over these on the blackboard.
3. For the intermediate level of culture, realia such as the currency of a particular country or reproductions of famous paintings, souvenir key chains, or refrigerator magnets can be passed around in class. Teacher commentary provides an explanation of who is on the currency and what that might signify. Alternatively, as in the case of Japan, some students in class might know of the figure on the ¥5,000-note, the celebrated Meiji-era novelist, Higuchi Ichiyo. This suggests the importance of the arts in Japan and of the Meiji era.
4. The teacher can illustrate the deep level of the iceberg metaphor by showing the opening sequence of *Baraka* (Magidson & Walpole, 1992), a sequence also available on YouTube. It presents religious worship in many different locales. Alternately, the teacher could pass around religious objects in class such as a crucifix or one of the charms for safe driving or good luck available from many Japanese Shinto temples.
5. The level of universal human needs can be illustrated by using photographs from the internet to show different foods eaten around the world. An Internet posting of Peter Menzel photographs (2012) is a good source here.
6. Once students have a conceptual understanding of the iceberg metaphor for culture, it serves as a template for their own analyses. The teacher has each student in the class choose a country to categorize in terms of the iceberg metaphor. The students are asked to prepare an A4-size poster of their countries with photographs and illustrations for each level of the iceberg and paragraph-length written descriptions for each level as well.

Procedure: Class 2

7. In the next class, students bring in their posters and descriptions and share these with three or four other students in a small group.
8. New groups are formed so that students can explain their posters to different students in the class. Students change groups three or four times. In this way, the concept of cultural complexity is further reinforced as each student sees many examples, and student oral fluency is promoted as well.
9. Alternately, if there is not enough time for several re-tellings, each small group can nominate the person with the most interesting poster to share with the rest of the class.
10. Another option with this task is to use it as the basis for a poster presentation in which students hang their posters on the wall and take turns viewing the posters or explaining them to each other.

Conclusion

Students respond very favorably to this task. The iceberg metaphor can be employed with students at lower levels of language ability because it has a strong pictorial aspect to it and the written descriptions of each level can be minimized to bullet points. A task such as this helps students to learn ICC. It also encourages critical thinking among students as they examine various cultural stereotypes and determine the symbols, the social norms, and the social impact of certain beliefs and values.

Postcard Puzzles for Intercultural Learning

Jon Dujmovich

Cognitive, affective, and behavior components comprise the objects of intercultural education and training and form the ABCs of acculturation (Fowler & Bloom, 2004; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Using realia like postcards is one effective and interesting way of introducing these components in the classroom. Postcards are windows into other worlds. Drawing attention to the cultural clues hidden in postcards, the instructor has an invaluable tool to guide students in acquiring cultural knowledge, learning cross-cultural skills, and adopting new attitudes towards different cultural values.

With the advent of online social media and popular sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, postcards have fallen out of favor as a means of correspondence. But with a look around the home or office, most teachers can come up with enough of them for “postcard puzzle” activities. Alternatively, instructors can create their own postcard library by asking students, friends, and colleagues to send postcards when traveling abroad. The latter would also provide instructors with the opportunity to set the parameters of written text.

To prepare the postcards for the activities; first, the teacher should black out any personal information such as names or addresses from the postcards. Next, the teacher should cut the cards into puzzle pieces. One of the ways to use this material is to use the pieces in a bridge activity for creating random groups for another activity to follow. It might be easier to keep several collections to use with student groups of different sizes, for example, a three-piece postcard puzzle for a group of three students.

Basic Procedure

1. The teacher distributes one piece of a postcard puzzle to every student. The teacher needs to ensure that all the pieces are used to recreate the postcard images and that there are no students left with “extra” pieces. This may mean having a group of three, for example, when all the other groups have four.
2. Instruct the students that they are to locate the other pieces that fit their puzzle. To do so, they may question and/or describe their piece to other students on a one-to-one basis. They are not to show their piece until they have confirmed they have found a match. Continue the process until all matches are found.
Once a student has located all members of his/her group, the group may then find a space to sit together and fit their puzzle pieces together recreating the postcard image. The teacher now has the students in random groups.

Procedure: Activity 1

1. Once the students have put together the postcards (photo facing up), the teacher should instruct the students to become cultural detectives and to look for cultural clues in the images by questioning others in the group. These cultural clues can be culture-specific (emic) or culture-general (etic) in nature and may reflect either surface culture (objects, behaviors) or deep culture (beliefs, values). Here are some sample lines of questioning:
 - i. *Image shows couple holding hands on a beach:* What does this image say about sexuality or male-female relationships in this culture? Are public displays of affection considered appropriate? How could the hand-holding be interpreted by others on the beach? What if it were female-female or male-male?

- ii. *Image shows crowded street scene at night:* What time do you think it is? Why do the restaurants appear to be so busy at this time? When are mealtimes in this culture? Is this a ‘normal’ evening or is there some event happening? If so, what is it?
 - iii. *Image shows a temple building and grounds:* What religion do you think is/was practiced here? What role does/did this location have in the everyday lives of local people? What is the significance of (*insert object here*) in the entrance?
2. Students take turns with lines of questioning in order to flesh out an image of the culture of which the photograph is representative.

Procedure: Activity 2

1. The teacher has the students turn the postcards over so the photo is face downward and the students can read what the writer has to say about the culture he/she is encountering. Ask the students to discuss the following questions:
 - i. What does the writer say that can confirm or reject some of your group assumptions made by observing the photo on the front?
 - ii. Does the writer “like” or “dislike” the culture? What evidence is there? Do you think the writer is in a “honeymoon” phase with the culture (blind to faults)?
 - iii. What point of view does the writer write from, an insider viewpoint (etic) or as an observer (emic)? Are there any biases or stereotypes in the writing? If so, what?
 - iv. Using your own knowledge of the culture, what insight can you give other group members about what the writer is talking about?
2. For a writing assignment for students, the teacher asks the students to take one of the following perspectives and write

a reply:

- i. As the recipient of the postcard, what would you want to ask about the culture?
- ii. As someone from the culture, what would you like to clarify or say to the writer?

Procedure: Activity 3

1. The instructor asks the students to examine the postage stamp(s) and postal markings. Students can discuss the cultural relevance of the stamps within their group. What is the cultural symbolic significance of the images shown on the postage stamp? For further activities and ideas on using postage stamps in the classroom, see Tomalin and Stempleski (1993).
2. Optional homework assignment: The teacher has students design their own postage stamp to reflect a particular culture and give a brief (written or oral) explanation of the significance and why they chose such a design.

Conclusion

Postcard puzzles can be a very effective means of introducing cross-cultural communication themes in a highly motivating way. They also offer the instructor a versatile tool to introduce various cultural concepts for use in almost any context, and with any size of class. It can be used as an icebreaking activity, to bridge activities, and as a means to form random groupings. Postcard puzzles assist teachers in deepening their students' cultural knowledge, intercultural observation skills, and motivation to examine their own behaviors.

International Comparisons in Raising Student Motivation

Robert McLaughlin

The following task utilizes a content-based instructional approach to introduce students to ICC. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) contend that one of the best ways to make effective materials in content-based instruction (CBI) is to employ those that students find relevant to their own lives. The topic of personal happiness proves especially compelling for students. The task also increases student motivation for learning English because students see English as a means of communicating with people from other countries.

In the first part of the task, the instructor introduces a report, "How's Life? Measuring Well-Being," a 2011 report by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). The report describes personal happiness and well-being in 40 different countries and students read the report and discuss it. For the second part of the task, students view a related lecture, "The Happy Planet Index," (Marks, 2011) on TED Talks (technology, entertainment and design talks), a global series of conferences available via the Internet. The task is completed over two lessons with the poster presentation in the third class.

The instructor presents the report through a cause-and-effect approach. Then the instructor shows how the charts and graphs from the OECD report can be incorporated into a simple, point-form presentation. One of the instructor's goals is to model a presentation for the students, to show them how to use key words and graphs to convey ideas, rather than reading from a paper. The other is to provide the class with sufficient knowledge of the content to be able to discuss it and to create their own posters later. Lack of content knowledge is sometimes a shortcoming of the CBI approach (Pica, 2002).

The teacher presentation segues to communication activities in class that involve reading and discussing the article. Next, students research material on countries mentioned in the report and try to identify the causes for their relative happiness or unhappiness. Students use this material to prepare for individual poster-presentations. An overview of the two lessons is as follows:

Procedure: Class 1

1. Students are shown a presentation which introduces the OECD report, with graphs that display the rank of the 40 countries in the study.
2. In pairs or small groups, students are asked to speculate on which criteria might be used to measure human happiness, with the first criteria—"employment"—given to them to elicit similar answers.
3. Students are asked to compare their answers with their partners, to provide reasons for their choices, and to compile a shared list.
4. The teacher conducts a whole class discussion of these lists, noting potential criteria on an overhead projection. After that, the teacher shows the list of criteria in the OECD report then asks students to note whether or not they agree with the importance of the criteria. They are also asked to formulate questions about which criteria surprise them.
5. Students are then asked to speculate on reasons why certain countries might rank on the lower end of the scale. For example, employment that is close to one's home relates to happiness whereas people who spend several hours commuting to work tend to be unhappier.
6. After in-class discussions of different criteria and the reasons why they are important to happiness, each student is asked to write a plan for his or her life. In this case, students

can use the criteria that they brainstormed earlier as well as any new criteria discussed in class.

7. Students then share their ideas through a Q & A-type interview with a partner or a group of three. One question might be, "Why would you like to stay in your hometown?"
8. To facilitate dialogue and model appropriate questions, the instructor provides sample questions on the board or overhead screen. Also, the teacher walks around the classroom, spending time with each group and prompting questions or eliciting details about their answers.

Procedure: Class 2

9. The teacher shows students the same graph from the OECD report as shown in Class 1, but emphasizes the top ten countries for happiness.
10. Students are each given a world map and asked to locate the ten countries.
11. Next, students are asked to brainstorm the traits that these 10 countries might share (e.g., small size, low population, etc.) and to provide reasons for their choices.
12. The teacher then shows students a list of the shared traits among the 10 countries. Students note the ones that surprise them and provide reasons why they are important.
13. To prepare for the video lecture, "The Happy Planet Index," students review the material from the previous class. With a partner, each student lists terms that might be used in the presentation as well as the factors that some countries might face that affect personal happiness. They are also asked to circle the factors that appeared on their lists and those that did not.
14. Finally, each student is asked to prepare a poster presentation to show how individuals and communities can raise

levels of personal happiness. Students are asked to show only key points and graphs or visual organizers on their posters. They are also encouraged to reread the original article and use vocabulary from it. In the next class, these posters are put up around the room and students take turns in presenting them to each other.

Conclusion

This task shows the importance of content in increasing student interest in intercultural communication and student motivation for language learning. In this case, learning the criteria for individual happiness also can help students to examine their own lives. Also, the use of graphs and other visual representations in the original text, as well as the presentation by the teacher and by the TED Talks speaker, shows students how they might employ visuals in their own presentations.

Focus on International Health Issues: Making a Healthier World

Gregory O'Dowd

As world interconnectedness accelerates, the development of ICC becomes increasingly important to successful interactions between people. This is particularly so in providing health care where communication failures between doctors, nurses, patients, and their relatives can lead to such problems as simple misunderstandings, anxiety, stress, anger, misdiagnosis, under-provision of medical care, and unnecessary death (Gibson & Zhong, 2005).

It is therefore essential for medical students to acquire ICC as part of their medical training. Unfortunately, these skills are not valued by medical curriculum developers (Hamilton, 2009). In addition, many teachers in Japan face classrooms with English

learners who are not motivated (Perkins, 2008). Yet motivation is a key component in language learning (Dornyei, 2001). Symptomatic of this lack of motivation is the recent drop in student interest in participating in overseas student exchanges as students focus more efforts on job-hunting, seek to avoid risks, and choose to live close to home, or at home with their parents (Yoshitaka, 2011). Indeed, at my medical university, the lack of student interest in exchange programs has led to their curtailment. The result is that students have no opportunities to develop ICC through experiences in exchange programs and teachers must therefore try to teach it in the classroom.

To increase student motivation to learn English and to emphasize the need for students to develop ICC, the following unit draws connections between health issues in Japan and globally. In this way, it demonstrates the importance of greater knowledge of the international medical community. The following tasks (approximately 30 minutes in each class) compliment the health topics in a course textbook and form an element of the students' semester grade.

Procedure: Class I

World Knowledge

1. The teacher asks the students in small groups to guess how many countries there are in the world (the consensus is 193 countries although the number ranges from 193 to 258, depending on the source; Rosenberg, 2011).
2. Next, the students are given a sheet of A4 paper and asked to draw a free-hand map of the world. After a few minutes, they are directed to write the names of as many countries as they can think of and allowed to adjust their map to accommodate any improvements.
3. Following this, the teacher asks the students to count how many countries they have identified. The teacher identifies

the student with the most countries and notes the class average. Usually, students greatly underestimate the number of countries, so this task makes them aware of how little they know of the global diversity.

4. On the reverse side of the map, the teacher asks the students to brainstorm as large a list of countries as they can for each letter of the alphabet (except “x” for which there are no countries).
5. As a whole class activity, the teacher makes a master list with all the countries that the students have noted.

Procedure: Class 2

Destinations

6. Next, the teacher gives the students a worksheet asking them to identify three countries they would most like to visit and to give reasons why, as well as three countries that they would not like to visit and why. Finally, the teacher asks students to list five countries that they had not heard of before which interest them.
7. The teacher then asks each student to select a country and do some research on it (see Appendix A).

Procedure: Class 3

Country Worksheet

8. The teacher asks each student to produce a country poster on A3-size paper with four information sectors: (a) some important information on their country, (b) a disease or medical problem, (c) details about treatments for the disease or medical problem, and (d) relate that disease to its treatment, if any, in Japan.

Procedure: Class 4

Poster Presentations

9. In small groups, the students see one another’s posters, question each other, then select the best poster. The students with the best posters change groups and present their material again. Depending on the time available, the students with the best posters can change groups several times.

Procedure: Class 5

Ranking

10. Students are asked to work in groups to rank items (diseases and conditions) relating to the leading causes of death in Japan.
11. Students take turns calling out their rankings and the teacher corrects them. Students then compare the rankings for low-income countries, middle-income countries, and high-income countries and suggest reasons for the differences with Japan.

Conclusion

Through these tasks, students revise and update their world knowledge, renew their interest in global matters and develop some needed ICC. They also draw connections between medicine and social issues, practice their presentation skills, and use higher-order thinking skills. In at least one class, this program impacted a student’s affective domain. After learning of some of the medical issues in India, the student spent part of her vacation volunteering at Mother Teresa’s “Mother House” in Kolkata (Calcutta).

Conclusions from the Forum

Gregory Strong

This paper showcases various classroom tasks to promote student awareness of cultural differences, to provide some basic means of cultural analysis, and to emphasize the importance of ICC and its role in promoting tolerance and appreciation of cultural diversity. Common to all of the tasks is the aim of sensitizing Japanese university students to their own ethnocentricity. Fantini (1999) contends that “contact with other world views can result in a shift of perspective along with a concomitant appreciation for the diversity and richness of human beings” (p.13).

Each task was developed for a specific educational context. This was done through a variety of content-based language learning lessons that combined imaginative activities such as creating visual maps based on a metaphor, assembling puzzles, or listening to media and reading material to create a poster presentation, and finally, drawing connections between health and material wealth. However, the tasks and the resources also have been described in a detailed manner, so as to encourage other teachers to adapt them to their own classrooms.

Acknowledgement

Figure 1. The Iceberg Metaphor for Culture is from *Understanding Intercultural Communication* (p. 28), by S. Ting-Toomey and L. C. Chung, 2004, Los Angeles: Roxbury. Copyright 2004 by Oxford University Press. Reprinted with permission.

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Appendix A Worksheet 2

Name:..... Group #

Student #

1. Country
2. Area
3. Population
4. Life expectancy. (male/female/children)
5. System of Government
6. Currency
7. Ethnicity
8. Language
9. Religion
10. Capital
11. Major cities
12. GDP
13. GDP per capita

- 14. Medical system.....
- 15.
- 16. Medical problems
- 17.
- 18. Diseases
-
- 19. Other information