Let’s Play Ball:
Using Cultural Themes in the English Classroom

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Does the teaching of culture have a place in the EFL classroom?
Why?

*(Don’t worry, there are no wrong answers!*)
Why Teach Culture?

In the old days we taught exclusively "target culture" competence (Canale, 1983).

Why is this not enough?
Why Teach Culture?

Intercultural Communicative Competence:

The ability to interact successfully with people who are different from you (Alptekin, 2002).
Culture is...???
A Possible Definition:

Culture is:

Values and beliefs

that help us to

identify ourselves

and

understand others
What we see

What we don't see
What do you see?
Interpreting Cultural Messages

It’s difficult!

When we lack background knowledge, we can easily misinterpret what we see.

But we often have no choice but to try and interpret anyway.
Interpreting Cultural Messages

As language teachers, we have a responsibility to help our learners to be better at this!

To make them better intercultural communicators

Because the world of English is made up of thousands of different cultures
Critical Thinking Skills

A set of skills our students can use to go beyond what they see and raise their awareness of the differences between people.
For Example...

Why do people smile?
What Does This Word Mean to Me?

Directions: Roll the dice and move the prescribed amount of spaces. Describe what the word in the box means to you.

The Past  My Room  Music  Family
School  Money  Pets  Teachers
Holidays  Favorite Food  Friends
My Country
Sports
English  Ideal Job  U.S.A.  Health
Hometown
Start
These “traditional” topics are already in your textbooks.

Use them to teach **usable** and **relevant** cultural skills!
Describe: What do you see?

Interpret: What do you think is happening?

Evaluate: What cultural values do you think are expressed in this activity?

(Bennett, Bennett, & Stillings, 1977)
Remember Bloom's Taxonomy?

(Anderson, Krathwohl, et al., 2001)
Practice!

Let’s use Describe/Interpret/Evaluate to try and understand what we see

You can do this in the classroom!
Triumph of the Underdog

Hard Work

American Values Communicated through Baseball

Self-Reliance

Sportsmanship
Universal Sports Themes

Rite of Passage

Uniforms

Songs and Dancing

Rules and Judges

Competition and Skill

Tradition and History

Spectators

Rituals and Superstition

Physical Prowess

Famous Players

Practice
How About Some Other Sports?

We want you to practice

*Describe/Interpret/Evaluate*

with two other sports!
Our Project Plan: Overview
Our Project Plan: Goals

- Practice the Four Language Skills for Useful, Communicative Purposes
- Improve Skills in Critical and Creative Thinking
- Explore Culture in a New Way that Makes Them Better Intercultural Communicators!
OUR PROJECT PLAN: STAGES

Stage 1: Controlled Activities
- Form project groups and discuss definitions of culture
- Read, write, and discuss the topic: Universal Sports Themes

Stage 2: Semi-Controlled and Independent Activities
- Practice interviews in class with your project group
- Conduct interviews outside of class on your sports theme
- Discuss your interview findings in your project group

Stage 3: Independent Activities
- Practice and give your group presentation
- Complete peer- and self-assessment worksheets
Why Project-Based Learning?

- Provide Holistic Feedback
- Engage in Critical Thinking Activities
- Allow Creative Language Use
- Tailor to Your Students’ Needs and Interests
- Encourage Independent Learning

What do you think?
Stage 1: Controlled Activities

In this stage, learners will...

- Select and explore a sport that has local cultural value
- Explore their own definitions of culture
- Explore universal sports themes
- Learn about American culture as it is expressed through baseball
Sports Brainstorm!
Cultural Values

Social Change

Definition of Time

Competition/Cooperation

Privacy

Work Ethic

Optimism/View of the Future

Collectivism/Individualism

Equality

Materialism

Level of Formality

Directness/Honesty
GAME SHOW
In this stage, learners will practice and conduct short interviews outside of class.

- They will develop their own interview skills and strategies.
- They will work in their project groups to summarize their findings and look for common threads.
- They will ask friends and family to share their own thoughts on cultural values in the local sport.

Stage 2: Semi-Controlled and independent Activities
What are some qualities of an effective interview?

- Take Good Notes
- Be Friendly and Patient!
- Ask Follow-Up Questions
- Make Sure Your Interviewee Understands What is Expected of Them
Stage 3: Independent Activities

In this stage, students will:

- Plan and practice their presentations
- Give presentations to the class
- Complete peer- and self-assessment worksheets
- Revisit their original definitions of culture
What makes a good presentation?

- Concise
- Organized
- Personalized
- Eye Contact
- Gestures
- SMILE!
- Tone and Projection

PRACTICE!
In Our Webinar Today

- We looked at traditional concepts of culture
- We discussed the importance of understanding the depth of culture
- We raised our awareness of the impact of lack of background knowledge
- We examined universal sports themes and cultural values
- We practiced engaging in the three phases of Describe/Interpret/Evaluate
- We explored a project to implement with our students to teach them usable and relevant cultural skills
OK, let’s do the same thing that our students will do in this project.

Answer the following question again:
What is culture?
References


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