

- 1. Report Title:** Developing Student's Empathy for Others Through Journal Writings
- 2. Class** First year high school students in the Intercultural Division
- Class Size:** 20 students
- Textbook:** Identity (Oxford University Press)

Problems Encountered:

1. Lack of a strong ability to empathize with others and their choices.
2. Hesitation to share ideas in front of other students.
3. Starting class and installing a new system four months into the school year.

3. Goal Develop Cross-Cultural Communication by developing their empathy students for other people and cultures through journal writing

4. What I tried.

1. Journals/ Newsletters

Following each class, students were asked to reflect in their journal notebook on what they liked and disliked about class, what they learned, percentage of English used in class, and how useful and interesting each of the activities were from the previous class were. The comments from the journals were then used to create the newsletter to be handed out, read and discussed in the following class.

2. Group work/Pair work

Group work and pair work were used to discuss the newsletters at the beginning of class and other discussion activities concerning the main activity, videos and surveys. The pair work/group work often times was held before class discussion as a way for students to discuss their ideas in a group before sharing with the class.

3. Teacher's personal stories-

In order for students to see a closer connection to the topics discussed in class I used some of my own personal stories as an supplement to the topics covered in the textbook Stories included, "My Friend Takuya", "My Identity in Sweden", "Tim's Values vs. Mine", "Taking Responsibility" These stories were used in group/pair work, classroom discussions, journals writings and exams.

4. Group project

At the end of the term, students were placed in groups and a topic they had studied over the previous terms. They worked to create a skit on a misunderstanding that might occur on the topic they were given. Then following the skit they had to explain why the misunderstanding happened.

5. Surveys

The first survey I gave to the students was entitled, “Self-Assessment of Internationalization” based on Sato and Hayashi (1998). This survey measures the students’ assessment of how aware they are internationally along with their ability to empathize with others. I gave the same survey to the students at the end of the spring term in March 2011. In order to assess their ability to empathize with others, 19 questions were selected out of the 63, which would measure empathy.

The second survey was given at the end of the term. The survey was based on the stories discussed over the year. Students were given statements with varying levels of empathy. They were asked to choose the statement which best reflects the idea of empathizing with another culture.

5. What happened?

Journal reflections length increased

As reflections are concerned, the nature of the reflections improved greatly from September to February. With more time allowed and more writing demanded of them, the output and reflections on each lesson improved in length and quality.

Full participation in journal work was not achieved.

At the beginning of the first term of my teaching, participation in-class reflections was around 100 percent. Students were given half size A4 sheets of paper to reflect on class. They were given 3-5 minutes at the end of class to write what they thought about class. In December notebooks were introduced and reflections were given as homework. After this, participation fell off. Dr. Sato advised me not to collect the journals every week as to give students more time to complete the journal work. A student even asked me to push the deadline back as well.

“I have suggestion that lengthening the deadline to Monday. Not just this week but always. Then, I think more students will submit their homework. It might be hard for you do this. But please consider this.”

D.H. February 9th, 2011

Personal stories attracted more attention.

I gave students two stories on the same topic. The first story was from the textbook. The second story was from my own personal experience. Students responded in their journal reflections positively and rated them higher than the story given in the textbook.

“I liked Kevin’s personal story very much. The story was quite interesting. I have imagined what if my brother did that.”

Y.S. January 12th, 2011

“I liked Takuya story more than Kijana’s (from the book). It helped me understand the topic more.”

L.U. December 15th, 2010

Sharing ideas and comments.

At the beginning of the year, students were not use to pair and group work. As the year went on, students became accustomed to talking in pairs and doing group work. Switching partners was even demanded by students. Generally their partners were their neighbors. However a group of students asked me to change the seating arrangement so they could have different partners. Some students expressed enjoyment talking with their friends and others wanted to talk to different classmates. One student who joined the class in January found the group work and pair work activities helpful in getting to know her new classmates.

“I liked to get in a small group to talk about topics. As a new student, I could know about my classmates a little better. Oh, I’m not demanding you to do so everyday, sharing stories class-wide is also very interesting.”

Y.S. January 26th, 2011

Other students enjoyed talking with their classmates and hearing their differing and similar opinions. One student reflected on the reason behind why her family rules are similar to her classmates.

“It was interesting listening to other people’s rule. I think why are rules are similar is involved in being in Japanese. Rules are involved in our culture. They are transmitted by ancestors. Foreign country people have similar rules”

K.I. January 26th, 2011

Moreover, some students found it easier to share their opinions in groups rather than in front of the entire class.

“In group work P.N. (positives and negatives), we can easily say our opinion.”

K.F. February 9th, 2011

Newsletters spurred the conversation

The newsletters made up of students comments were helpful for students to review and discuss with their classmates what they studied in the previous class. Some comments even furthered discussion and students reflected on them in their next journal entry.

“Watching video, when the boy said, ‘I think Japanese people’s manner must look quite good from English people.’ I felt kind of uncomfortable, but I didn’t know what was so uncomfortable then. Now, thinking about it over, a thought came over me, ‘Does he know about English people!?’ I don’t really know about English people, too. But for me, saying those comments without knowing them is inappropriate.”

-Y.S. January 12th, 2011

One week later,

“I agree with the person who wrote, ‘It’s not appropriate for the boy to talk in perspectives.’ I also didn’t feel good when the boy said, ‘Japanese manners seem good from English people.’ But I didn’t think why. When I read the newsletter I understood why I didn’t feel good.

-M.I. January 19th, 2011.

However, some students expressed confusion or dislike for the newsletter. Some students were not clear on the purpose of the newsletter. One student felt it difficult to talk about the newsletter in groups or pairs.

“I don’t like newspaper talk. Because I can speak English a little. If I can speak English very well, I can enjoy talking in English...”

-A.Y. January 19th, 2011

While another didn’t like the newsletter but found it interesting about the varieties of opinions expressed.

“I don’t really like the newsletter, to be honest. But it is interesting that there are many perspectives.”

-K.T. January 19th, 2011

Even one student from the other class stopped me after class and gave me advice on how to improve the newsletter. This student wanted to see differing opinions put against

each other.

Improving English through journal and newsletter.

Some students said through the newsletters and journals they could improve their English. I was not sure if I should correct the students' before putting them in the newsletter or if I should have the students try to edit the comments and make corrections themselves. Overwhelmingly, students asked me to edit them prior to putting them in the newsletter. They wanted me to point out the edits, too. This class is content-oriented, yet students saw this class as a way to improve their English. One student explained,

"I heard some voices like, 'I don't like the newsletter' or 'I don't like writing the journal.' But I do like the newsletter and the journal, both. I can know other thoughts with the newsletter and I feel my English is improving, through writing this."

D.H. February 9th, 2011.

Developing Cultural Awareness

When presented with situations where people would communicate or react differently, students developed a better sense of cultural awareness. In a class where students were given two different signs regarding the same topic of picking up after your dog, students could see different types of communication styles. Students reflected on signs that had been seen in countries and showed curiosity about others.

"When I lived in America, there were signs like, 'Keep Out', 'Don't let your dog in the grass' but in Japan they are like 'Please keep out. It's dangerous.' I'm interested in this difference. Also, I'm interested in signs over the world. I would like to see the book you talked about."

-M.I. January 19th, 2011

"I like this class. But I want to see other country's manners. Other country people have different cultures and perspectives from Japanese. So I'm interested in what other country people think good or bad. And I also want to know how other country people think about Japanese manners. How do you think about Japanese manners?"

-Ka.I. January 12th, 2011

Developing Empathy

Students showed varying levels of empathy depending on the topic. In regards to

manners and communication styles, students expressed in their exams, journal entries and group projects an understanding of why people may act or communicate differently.

“I think the signs are different because maybe people in Japan don’t say things frankly and they are very gentle but they are very gentle but in America people say things directly and like to get a simple answer. But I think you have both kind of signs and not just one depending on the situation.”

-L.U. February 2nd, 2011

“I learned everyone has different thoughts about lifestyles (choices).”

-A.Y. February 9th, 2011

“...both ideas of thinking are OK because we have different ideas in this situation.”

-Ka. I February 9th, 2011

However, when it came to writing about lifestyle choices, some students were okay with people making different decisions and knowing why they would make that decision.

“Challenging for Hollywood must be more interesting and fun life for him: Even if he fails his job, I think he won’t regret because he has done what he desires. I don’t think stable life is always the best.”

-S.S. February 9th, 2011

Yet, some still tried to advise the person in question to act as they would.

“I would tell him the good points of a stable life...bad points of having a challenging job...and the risk that you will lose your job easily. But if he wanted to be a actor then I will try and support him and do what I can do for him.”

-L.U. February 9th, 2011

Over the classes this year, students continually showed interest in knowing other people’s opinions and feelings. Through group work and pair work, students could hear the values and culture of their fellow classmates and the personal stories from other student’s experiences. Each week journal entries displayed interest in learning from others and other cultures. As questions were framed specifically to measure students’ empathize with other people and their lifestyle choices and values, the students’ ability to empathize was easier to assess.

Analyzing the surveys.

From Sato and Hayashi (1998) on average of the students surveyed, levels of empathy

did not improve. Empathy levels based only on these surveys decreased on average of 2.7 points. Of the 17 respondents, five improved their ability to empathize, while 12 respondents did not.

From the second survey, there were three questions. First question 58% of respondents selected the statement best exemplifying empathy for others. The second question 56% respondents and the third question 64% of respondents selected statements that showed the best of idea of empathy.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with two students over a period of the term. The interviewees were given the same question and asked to reflect on the previous course and their journal writings. Interviews with two students continued throughout the term. Others, who agreed to be interviewed earlier, did not continue to be interviewed for different reasons.

6. What I learned

Inconclusive survey results

The same surveys given at the beginning and at the end of the year, showed no conclusive results. Without a student's explanations of why they selected the answers they did, it is hard to find any correlation between the results of both surveys.

Negative attitudes effects participation

According to a survey given at the end of the term, students who said they disliked writing in their journals, did not complete every journal assignment. Of those people who disliked the journal, most answered they did not complete the journal assignments, nor enjoy the newsletter and seeing their comments in the newsletter.

Students' comments stimulate

The newsletter can stimulate classroom conversation and following journal entries. Yet, without a clear focus for conversation activities, the newsletter will not inspire conversation. Too many comments on various topics can confuse students. Without a specific topic and questions to discuss from the newsletter, group and pair discussions will be hampered.

Follow up comments and questions I gave encouraged further and deeper writing.

At first, I tried to read carefully every student's writing, as well provide comments and follow-up questions concerning their writings. Several students responded well and increased their writings the next time. However, as the term went on, I was asked to

take on nine extra Oral Communication classes a week and struggled to find the time to write comments and ask questions on every journal entry. Students in other classes wrote to me or spoke to me and asked when I was going to respond or make comments on their writings.

Students increased the writing when asked.

Not only did comments and questions on journal writings help increase the writing amount, as did increasing the amount demanded. At first, students were given half an A4 sheet of the paper and a few minutes at the end of class to fill it out. Responses were pretty short, general in nature and without a detailed reflection on class. When given a notebook and demanded they write a full page, students wrote a little more. However, they still had to be asked to write more. Eventually more students began to fill 80% or more of the notebook page.

Students writing and enjoyment with class increase as familiarity with topic grows.

When presented with stories that are interesting and relatable to students, their writing output increased. The stories told from their textbook did not provoke as much reaction as did personal stories on the same themes from the ALT. Even if the student's had not experienced a similar situation, they still displayed interest in the topic. One student expressed:

“Class was good because of group work, not only partner work. The topics were familiar, so I enjoyed...”

S.W. January 26th, 2011

Measuring empathy requires focused situations and questions

When students were not given a contrast of cultures, it was hard to measure their ability to empathize. The contrast of cultures needs to be on the same theme or topic. In one class, I showed Tokyo Metro Subway manner signs. Then I showed signs from America but they were not related to mass transportation. When it came for students to think about the differences and why they existed, their answers varied and show little empathy or understanding for the differences in message, language and communication styles. Next time, upon advice my advisor, I showed contrasting signs on the same theme and topic. The writings clearly showed the students' abilities to understand the differences in the signs and why differences existed.

7. Future Issues.

Limited Time

The new school year will start in April. I will be able to work with the incoming first year students in the same class, Cross Cultural Understanding. The time period will only last until the end of the July. Despite the short time period, the plan is to continue the journal reflections. It is unknown whether they will continue after I leave the school.

Assessing Empathy

I will use shorter targeted surveys. The survey of 63 questions may have been too overwhelming for the students. To make more sense of the surveys, there needs to be more discussion or writing activities in explaining the answers to the surveys.

I will need to present effective critical situations that will be make it easier to measure students' abilities to empathize with others.

Discussion questions will also have to be effective in allowing to students to think about the differing cultures presented to them.

Collaborating closer with the JTE

I would like to work closer with the JTE and in planning and preparing for our classes. Having two teachers work on separate yet at times overlapping themes may have been too confusing for the students. If the JTE and ALT can coordinate lessons, it is the ALT's belief that the students learning experience will be more focused and coherent.

Providing a more coherent strategy and plan for the next year's course will hopefully motivate the learners to write more and share their feelings. Examples of what is expected will alleviate confusion as well.

Level: senior high school first year students in intercultural division

Class size: 20 students

Textbook: Identity (Oxford University Press) Section 2. Values.

Goal: Continue to improve cross-cultural communication by seeing the differences in communication styles.

Objectives:

1. Recognize differences between the two signs presented to them
2. Think about why those differences exist.
3. Share ideas on manners and values with fellow students

Materials: pens, handouts, signs

Procedure

1. Read Newsletter. 3-5 minutes. Teachers pass out newsletters made up of comments from the previous class. Students read the newsletter and circle two interesting comments from the newsletter.
2. Newsletter Discussion. 3-5 minutes. Talk about some points from the newsletter
Ask students to discuss some of the points touched on in the newsletter. Listen then discuss some points from the newsletter with neighboring students.
3. Photo Sharing. 10 minutes. Ask students to show photos of signs regarding manners in their own neighborhood. Discuss in groups, the manners displayed, what is the reason, if it is necessary. The values taught.
4. Display Two Photos. 5-7 minutes. Show two photos on the same theme from different countries. Examine both photos.
5. Discuss Two Photos. 5-7 minutes. Reflecting on what students know already about communication styles, discuss the differences in the signs and why they exist.
6. Display Other Signs. 5 minutes. Display other signs using direct and indirect language. Examine other photos. Reflect on the language used.
7. Answer Questions about Signs. 5 minutes. Help provide any extra information. With the remaining time, answer the questions on the worksheet given to them.
8. Explain Homework. 4 minutes. AET explains how to fill out this week's journal. Students listen, make notes and ask questions if necessary.



Japan



America

In your journal for next journal writing. Please write about these two signs.

Think about the language of the sign. Think about the image on the sign.

Question	Answer. Choose one.
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1) Which sign do you like better?	Japan's sign/ America's sign
2) What language do you like better?	Japan's language/ America's language
3) How does each sign make you feel?	Happy/ Good/ Sad/ Scared/ or Other _____
4) Why does the sign make you feel that way?	(Write your answer in your journal)
5) Why do you think these signs are different?	(Write your answer in your journal)

