Covering Culture in the Pre-service Teacher Practicum

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Abstract

Pre-service teachers attending MA TESOL programs often conduct practicum lessons as part of their degree requirements. Typically, lesson-planning of the practicum is focused on improving teaching skills according to best practices in second language acquisition (SLA). Practica given at the university level (where language-focus learning is supplemented with authentic material) can cause pre-service teachers difficulty as they are generally not experienced with content and language integrated learning (CLIL) or content-based approaches. The study presented here describes one pre-service teacher tasked with delivering a lesson using authentic materials dealing with how the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement is interpreted in Japan. The novice teacher needed to design an engaging lesson covering issues related to the topic, such as cultural appropriation, racism and xenophobia. The authors, the master teacher and the novice, each describe how they approached the topic and worked to co-design a lesson that served the intercultural awareness-raising purpose of the unit, while still proving insightful as a practicum experience.

要旨

英語教授法を学ぶ大学院修士課程の学生は、教員養成過程の単位習得の一環として、大学において教育実習を行うことが多い。教育実習の授業計画の際に典型的に用いられるのは、第二言語習得における最も優れた授業実践である。大学で行われる教育実習（外国語使用を重点的に行う授業で、補足教材としてオセンティックな教材を用いる）は、内容言語統合型学習（CLIL）や学習内容に重点をおいた学習法（content-based approach）を行うことの経験が乏しい教育実習生にとって、困難なものとなる。この研究は、1人の教育実習生がBlack Lives Matter (BLM)の社会運動が日本でどのように解釈されているか、授業を行った様子を記述している。 この教育実習生は、テーマに関連した事柄、例えば文化盗用や人種差別、外国人恐怖症などを取り扱い、学生の興味関心を引き出す授業を考案する必要がある。筆者ら（指導教員と教育実習生）は各々どのようにテーマを提示したのか述べ、教育実習を意義あるものにするために、異文化に対する意識を高める目的の授業案を共同で作成した。

In this descriptive, reflective paper, I (Chris) as the "master" teacher and David, as the "novice," will describe the process we went through in one practicum course. First, I will give an overview of the graduate program at Akita International University (AIU), and the practicum in particular. I will next provide context of the course in which David did his practicum teaching, an undergraduate writing course at AIU and briefly explain the concept of "English for Liberal Arts," which is an approach to second-language teaching focused on critical thinking and intercultural understanding. Following these descriptions of the context for the practicum, David will provide a discussion of the process from his perspective including some action-research data he collected from the practicum. While this paper is not intended to be a research paper in the Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS) tradition, David does provide and examine some student conversation data in order to better understand the effectiveness of his lesson, rather than to address a research question or hypothesis. In the graduate program, students are taught conversation analysis (CA) transcription methodology as a means of enhancing their understanding of classroom interaction and the importance of conducting localized action research. By describing the process, and looking at student conversation data, he is able to reflect more deeply about the practicum and explore what changed about his teaching beliefs and how this new understanding will impact his teaching going forward. Finally, I will conclude with my own reflection on the direction of teacher-preparation programs in Japan.

The Practicum

The English Teaching Practices Program at AIU is a graduate program for pre and in-service teachers in Japan. Over their two years in the program, student teachers gain understanding of the field of English as a foreign language (EFL) and learn how to engage in "best practices." In addition to the courses one would expect to see in a TESOL program (such as second language acquisition, sociolinguistics and pedagogical grammar), a large portion of the curriculum is centered around actual classroom practices. In the three practicum courses students take, they are able to put to use their developing hypotheses about how language is learned and develop and deliver materials they believe would best serve that purpose. As the practica are conducted in "real" classrooms (as guest lecturers), each of the three practica serve as real-world training for the student-teachers. Each practicum is built upon the belief that teachers should reflect on their craft at every stage of their development, and in this way, student-teachers are able to engage in this reflective process at three stages in their development. Student teachers in the program are asked to view teaching from a new lens, one that is tinted with the pedagogical and theoretical knowledge they are gaining throughout the program and "move towards a transformation

of that knowledge, and in the process, of themselves" (Snyder, Hale & Myskow, 2020, p. 181). This reflection process is supported and guided by the faculty in the program, who serve as "master" teachers. The point of this reflective process is to help the novice teachers assume their roles as professional educators and become the models of "best practices" in their future teaching contexts - essentially, to become "masters" themselves.

The EAP and 'English for Liberal Arts'

In the second practicum, David, a student teacher, observed and taught a series of lessons in my undergraduate writing course in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at AIU. The philosophical organization of the EAP is based on a novel approach to English language teaching in Japan called *English for Liberal Arts* (ELA) (see Nani & Hale, 2020; Hale, 2015; Hale & Wadden, 2013). TESOL professionals working at the tertiary level are generally familiar with language teaching approaches, such as content-based language teaching (CBLT) or English for specific purposes (ESP). ELA goes beyond these familiar approaches in that it uses content and concepts inherent to a liberal arts education. Rather than following a language-learning textbook, teachers design materials that are relevant and can engage students in the moment, such as the Afghan refugee crisis, vaccine hesitancy, or, as in the case presented below, the lack of traction of the Black Lives Matter movement in Japan. The aim is for teachers to guide students towards critical thinking and thoughtful engagements of the topics in an effort to not only understand these complex issues, but to find solutions to them. In this way, the language curriculum is based on the liberal arts model, rather than a separate experience where students "learn a foreign language," then move on to the "actual" learning that takes place later in their university content courses. An ELA approach prepares students to be proficient English-language users, but more importantly, it gives them the foundation from which to integrate fully into a liberal arts-oriented academic community where they can grapple with the pressing issues facing humanity.

The Assignment

One of the objectives for my (David's) teaching practicum during Fall semester 2020 was to put together a 75-minute Zoom lesson in Dr. Hale's academic writing course, which consisted of sixteen high-proficiency students in either their first or second year of undergraduate study. Prior to my lesson, students were assigned an article to read titled, "*In Japan, the Message of Anti-Racism Protests Fails to Hit Home*" (Rich & Hida, 2020). The purpose of my lesson was to enhance students' understanding of the central concepts addressed in the article and provide them with opportunities to engage with each other to

deepen their interpretation of these concepts and to see that this topic was relevant to Japan by having students explore racism here. In the weeks following my lesson, students were expected to use the contents from this article to write a composition on racism in Japan.

After observing two lessons, I was able to gauge my target students' levels and outline a first draft of a lesson plan. In order to help students understand the Black Lives Matter movement as it pertained to Japan, I selected several important themes from the article, including cultural appropriation, discrimination against minorities, and institutional racism. I planned to introduce these concepts by assisting students in making connections between some key quotes from the article. For instance, I wanted to present three examples of cultural appropriation from the article, and then ask students to analyze these examples to find a core concept that could aid their understanding of cultural appropriation. My overall intent for this activity was for students to glean important concepts from the article, which would serve as a basis for discussion. In reviewing my initial teaching plan with Dr. Hale, I was advised to spend less time on comprehension and put a heavier emphasis on critical thinking. We had a lengthy discussion about how comprehending the language itself should not be overlooked, but, beyond that, the fundamental aim of the lesson should be to push students to re-examine their own perspectives on racism in Japan. Dr. Hale called this "rattling their cage."

With a renewed understanding of my teaching assignment, I went back to the drawing board and overhauled much of my lesson plan. The first of two major changes was to replace the comprehension-based content I had planned with some videos and pictures that would be relevant to students. These included pictures of racial segregation in the U.S. and South Africa, a controversial Katy Perry music video, and an All Nippon Airways (ANA) TV commercial that was controversial in its racial insensitivity and was ultimately banned. It was my hope that tying concepts from the article to media that students were familiar with would stimulate interest and lead to deeper thought and more participation. The second major change was to devise a plan to draw out students' initial opinions on racism, then provide them with important concepts they could use to re-evaluate their initial opinions. For example, in the beginning of class, I wanted to show a picture of a segregated drinking fountain from the U.S. in the 1950's for "blacks" and "whites" to get students thinking generally about racism. Later in the class, after introducing the concept of "institutionalized racism," my plan was to show the same picture again and ask students to analyze it next to images of segregated public spaces in Japan, such as from *onsen* with separate entrances

for Japanese and foreigners and restaurants and bars with "no foreigners" signs posted on their entrances as well as apartment real estate listings which indicate whether or not foreigners are welcome to live there. Through introducing selected content at the initial stages of the lesson, and then re-introducing the same content at later stages of the lesson, my goal was to induce students to see how their thoughts on racial issues changed over the course of the lesson. My hope with this approach was that students who may not have initially seen much relevance with the BLM movement and Japan, would come to recognize that in fact Japan has much to recon with in terms of its own racial discrimination issues.

The Lesson

In this section, I (David) will use student interaction data to describe the classroom interaction that took place during my teaching practicum. The lesson included whole class discussions and small group discussions of three or four students. Video and audio data from both settings were collected and transcribed according to conversation analysis (CA) methodology (see Appendix for transcription symbols), which is taught in the MA program at AIU to encourage reflective action research. Two segments of whole class discussions and two group discussions were transcribed (a total of twenty-five minutes of classroom data). In the transcriptions, students were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

The transcribed data was useful for me to better understand the effectiveness of my lesson, and to see if students were engaging with the topic in the way I had hoped. Upon analyzing my data, I found a number of salient points, one of which was the level of engagement and introspection displayed by students. Table 1 shows an excerpt from a whole class discussion on cultural appropriation. Students watched a video of a Japanese comedian (Mr. Yamadera) who wore black face paint and did an impersonation of Louis Armstrong. Students were then asked whether or not they could find any elements of cultural appropriation in the video.

Table 1

Getting Permission to Speak

	Line	Speaker	Talk
→	1	Rina	Can I ask a question to Arisa and Kei?
	2	Teacher	Yes go ahead. Sure.
	3	Rina	nn:: yeah I think this:: Yamadera-san is like the kind of cultural
	4		appropriation. He imitate the actor of not the all black people but
	5		the person- <<Louis Armstrong>>. So I wonder where is the
	6		distinguishing line between the imitation and the cultural
	7		appropriation? So could you tell me how do you think?

This short teacher-student exchange demonstrates the beginnings of cross-discussion, which Lemke (1985) describes as a rare form of classroom interaction in which students talk directly to each other, leaving the teacher as a moderator of discussion. Because much of my teacher-fronted talk was marked by recurring initiation-response-feedback (IRF) sequences, I was pleasantly surprised to see students attempt to wrestle control of the discussion away from me. This showed that they were willing to involve themselves in discussion by questioning and disagreeing with each other on what many would consider a controversial or even "taboo" topic in Japan.

Moments later, another instance of cross-discussion unfolded (Table 2), as Ayaka and Miho talked about the same video of the Japanese comedian impersonating Louis Armstrong.

Table 2

Agreeing to Disagree

	Line	Speaker	Talk
→	1	Ayaka	Well I think that's the point of it because <u>in Japan</u> people don't see
	2		it as racism or like <<cultural appropriation>> but <u>in the U.S.</u> or
	3		uhm let's say in many parts of the world consider it as cultural
	4		appropriation like for- like what I mean is that in Japan >>not like-
	5		maybe- it's the same<< as any other people imitating uhm other
	6		people but u::h in like many other parts of the world it's considered
	7		as it [so::]
→	8	Miho	[mh] Right. So we have to be careful about the international
	9		ro<u>:</u>le=
	10	Ayaka	=Yee- [yeah] especially in the like age of globalization people can
	11	Miho	[yeah]
	12	Ayaka	easily watch these videos and be offended so:: <<we might be->>
	13		we should probably like (1.0) yeah [be aware of that.]
	14	Miho	[yeah]

The dialogue presented in Table 2 was also notable in that it showed how students were beginning to examine how racism is perceived in Japan, which was my goal. In lines 1-7, Ayaka argues that this video would not be viewed as cultural appropriation in Japan, but in other parts of the world, it would be interpreted as such. This is noteworthy because she touches on an important theme—that in Japan, racism is not understood like it is globally. Miho (lines 8-9), the student who initiated this cross-discussion, acknowledges this point as both students seemed to reach a shared understanding. In reviewing this section of the data, it was encouraging to find that not only did students have strong opinions on the topic, but they also sought out opportunities to explore the thinking of their classmates.

Towards the end of the lesson, I had one culminating discussion planned for students. To this point, students talked about how there was a gap between the public perception of racism in Japan and reality. I assigned students to Zoom breakout rooms and asked them to discuss what might be causing this gap. Students were to share their opinions on this by using Fisher and Adams's (1994) four categories of perception: perception as experiential, inferential, selective, and contextual. Because students read about these categories of perception during a previous unit, this discussion was implemented to help them synthesize information from their previous reading on intercultural communication. Table 3 shows one opinion that was voiced in many of the breakout rooms.

Table 3

Valuing Intercultural Communication

Line	Speaker	Talk
1	Emi	I agree with it to Yuna's opinion. I think there's not much discussion about
2		cultures. Uhm:: when I was in- when I went to America American high school
3		students talked about like different language or cultures like daily basis but
4		in Japan we don't have like have discussion about it. We don't really talk about
5		Uhm how other cultures have like influence on our culture so maybe (1.0) if-
6		>yeah that's< I think that is one of the uhm examples of like lacking of
7		experiences (2.0)

In Table 3, Emi states that topics pertaining to race, culture, and language are not commonly discussed at school, which is one reason why Japanese students may not have sufficient experience to grasp the reality of racism. Emi, like some of the other students in this class, brought in her own stories of being an exchange student to show how experience can shape one's perception of racism. Students in other groups put forward other intriguing opinions as well. One student mentioned that today it is not uncommon to encounter classmates of diverse racial backgrounds at school, yet Japanese people tend to fall back on the excuse that racial insensitivity stems from a lack of experience. Another student talked about how the BLM movement attracted bandwagon supporters on Japanese social

media who simply wanted to follow a trend. These were some examples of students sharing their ideas on what might be causing this gap between the perception of racism in Japan and reality.

Reflection

This practicum experience provided valuable insight into how I need to adapt my teaching style to meet the aims of content-based language education, particularly facilitating critical thinking and learner-centered interaction. Prior to beginning my graduate studies, most of my teaching experience involved language-based curriculum, where motivating students to participate and express their opinions and correcting for accuracy were primary goals. As such, it was a new challenge for me to teach higher-level students who were self-motivated and skilled enough to express themselves on a wide range of academic topics. There were two main takeaways that will undoubtedly prove to be instrumental as I grow into becoming a more multifaceted language educator.

The first is designing relevant content. Discussing Katy Perry's music video "Dark Horse" turned out to be one of the more thought-provoking moments of the class. In the video, Perry (who is white) is dressed like Cleopatra and carried by slaves (who are all black) in a fantastical world based on ancient Egypt. Many of the students had seen this music video before but, clearly, had not considered it from the point of view of cultural appropriation. It became apparent that their personal interests in Katy Perry as an entertainer and cultural icon came into conflict with what they were learning about racism. In this way, I found that presenting content that students are likely to be familiar with while asking them to view this content from a new vantage point can be a stimulating starting point for discussion. Through such an experience, students can see for themselves how the knowledge they acquire in class can shape the way they view the world around them.

Another important skill that I developed from this practicum was learning how to facilitate discussion. As I mentioned, in my previous teaching experiences, building up students' confidence to speak their minds in class was an achievement in and of itself. In teaching this group of students, I had to change my expectations and, thus, the way I approached interaction with students. Anticipating what students might say, knowing what comments might drive discussion further, and encouraging students to disagree and respond to each other's comments were key skills that I realized I needed to develop. In dissecting my interaction with students, I was able to recognize where I failed to capitalize on some critical opportunities for compelling classroom discussion. By reviewing these segments of the

data with Dr. Hale, I gained invaluable advice on how I can modify my interactional practices with students.

Coupling relevant content with the ability to respond to students in a way that entices further interaction is an essential component of content-based instruction in an English for Liberal Arts approach. My first endeavor into this world of teaching helped me see that an important skill that teachers must possess is the versatility to adjust their interactional practices to meet the goals of their students. Working with highly proficient students in a rigorous undergraduate program opened my eyes to the array of teaching approaches I need to develop in order to be a well-balanced English teacher.

Conclusion

The practicum is an essential "training ground" for pre-service teachers to explore their developing understanding of how best to teach English. As David found, particularly in higher education contexts, there is much more a teacher can do in the classroom than maximize opportunities for "output" and comprehending texts. That is only the first responsibility of the language teacher, and should not be considered the ultimate goal. In a world with so many pressing issues requiring critical thought and intercultural awareness, teachers must choose relevant topics and texts that can move students beyond superficial understanding and towards actually addressing those issues. This approach requires teachers to be more than language experts but also facilitators for their students' developing self and intercultural awareness. At AIU, it is the goal of the MA program to prepare future English educators for this multifaceted role. The "English for Liberal Arts" approach followed at AIU (and increasingly at other Japanese universities) seems best suited to the task. With the Ministry of Education (MEXT) placing a heightened importance on critical thinking and intercultural understanding in English education, the old ways of preparing teachers for the field are no longer adequate. While the practicum is an essential experience for future teachers, it needs to be coupled with course work that emphasizes and explores the increasingly socially-conscious content that appears in tertiary (and increasingly secondary-school) English curriculums. It is no longer enough to lead students to an understanding of a problem – they are now required to think about the solutions to it.

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Appendix
Conversation Analysis Transcription Symbols

. (period) Falling intonation.

? (question mark) Rising intonation.

, (comma) Continuing intonation.

- (hyphen) Marks an abrupt cut-off.

:: (colon(s)) Prolonging of sound.

wo:rd (colon after underlined letter) Falling intonation on word.

wo:rd (underlined colon) Rising intonation on word.

word (underlining)

word The more underlying, the greater the stress.

WORD   (all caps) Loud speech.

°word°   (degree symbols) Quiet speech.

↑word (upward arrow) raised pitch.

↓word (downward arrow) lowered pitch

>>word<<   (more than and less than) Quicker speech.

<<word>>   (less than & more than) Slowed speech.

< (less than) Talk is jump-started—starting with a rush.

hh (series of h's) Aspiration or laughter.

.hh (h's preceded by dot) Inhalation.

[ ] (brackets) simultaneous or overlapping speech.

[ ]

= (equal sign) Latch or contiguous utterances of the same speaker.

(2.4) (number in parentheses) Length of a silence in 10ths of a second

(.) (period in parentheses) Micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.

( ) (empty parentheses) Non-transcribable segment of talk.

((gazing toward the ceiling)) (double parentheses) Description of non-speech activity.

(try 1)/(try 2) (two parentheses separated by a slash) Alternative hearings.

$word$ (dollar signs) Smiley voice.

#word# (number signs) Squeaky voice.

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