

Teaching International Students to Share their Culture Through a Multimodal Brochure Presentation: Literacy Acquisition Through Cultural Relevance

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Abstract

This article is based on one of my assignments in the Rhetoric and Composition Course for international students (please see appendix A for assignment guidelines). This particular project is designed to help international students with limited English language proficiency to design a culture brochure for presentation in class so their cultures are valued. The first section of the article deals with the cognitive aspect of the assignment and the second segment describes the pedagogical aspect. The final section deals with a few sample brochures and their purpose. I drew from constructivism (Vygotsky, 1989), visual literacy (Li-Chung, 2006), text-picture relationship (Sipe, 2008; Nodelman, 1988) and culturally relevant topics (Ladson-Billings, 2009) for students' psychological wellbeing in a new academic and social environment. The article also supports Shor's (1992) emotional literacy, which is the cornerstone of critical thinking.

Key Words: Brochure, Cultural Relevance, Emotional Literacy, Oral Presentation, Visual Literacy,

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According to Obst & Forster (2014), 600,000 international students study abroad and 40% go to the US for higher education. A small percentage of this international student population study the English language from the basics using a language immersion program called Intensive English Program (IEP). These students enroll in the IEP at various universities around the country. Some of these students live on campus, while others are day scholars. Many of the students experience culture shock due to alienation and separation from their native

cultures when they arrive in the U.S. Some students' cultures are not addressed in schools or marginalized due to Bernstein's curriculum framing and a lack of educators who are trained to deal with diverse cultures. Students have to learn to cope with problems on their own, but through classroom curriculum professors can help to diffuse some of the issues associated with the emotionally draining transition.

Along with emotional problems, the dual language learners (DLLs) also face another obstacle. The constant use of the English language both inside the classroom and outside in the community may pose a serious threat to the DLLs. Some may not have had prospects to articulate their thoughts in English back home. Meritt (2013) claims, "ELLs [DLL] need frequent opportunities to talk, to read, and to write in order to advance their language and literacy abilities" (p. 39). In addition, Ajayi (2008) found that ELL or DLL must be provided with contextual and experiential assignments for academic progress in the U.S. The culture brochure provides the DLLs with an opportunity to present information about their culture, and enables the DLLs to contextualize their learning.

One example of helping marginalized students in the classroom is by integrating cultural education into classrooms. As a transnational professor, I always try to ease their pain by enabling them to read, write, and talk about their culture, heritage, and background. IN addition to essays, one of the assignments in my Rhetoric and Composition class is the culture brochure oral presentation. This project involves teaching with visual literacy that students may already be proficient in based on their social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Hashtag) activities. Li-Chung (2006) claims that visual literacy should be incorporated into pedagogical classroom practices.

This brochure project has several advantages. It teaches international students the following skills.

1. Designing a Brochure

Designing a brochure calls for special skills. Students have to be proficient with either power point or using a brochure template. After they locate a particular design they are comfortable using, they have to choose pictures and add text that describes the images. Since the text in the brochure is not linear as in a word document, students must work around the text and

within the confines of columns. They have to spend time with the layout so the information makes sense to the audience.

2. Text-picture Relationship

This is a complex process where students have to be aware of how to manage pictures with text in the brochure. According to Nodelman (2008), “The words change the pictures and the pictures change the words” (p. 220). So students should take care that these elements in the brochure augment each other and do not distract the reader. Further, Sipe (2008) is of the opinion that words and pictures complement, enhance, and contrast each other.

3. Research Including Citation

I invite a librarian as a guest speaker to my classes to teach my students library skills including brainstorming for a topic, researching the issue, and finally learning how to cite the pictures using the American Psychological Association (APA) format. Some students freely borrow from Google images without citing the source, so we discuss citation of pictures to avoid plagiarism. We also discuss synthesizing the information using students’ language. During the in-class library instruction session, we also learn to consolidate the research findings in case students used search engines to find additional pertinent information. I introduce students to Google Scholar, EBSCO HOST, Academic Search Premier, Science Direct, Academic Search Elite, Nexus-Lexis, Academic Publications, Anthropological Literature (Harvard maintained), Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Cornell maintained), ATLA Religion Data base (through the university library), FOREST (Internet East Asian Library), and JURN: Arts and Humanities

4. Multimodality

For some international students, it may be the first time they are asked to use a multimodal approach for an assignment. I discussed what multimodal approach was and then let them explore. According to the New England Group (1996), “In the 21st-century world, global literacy practices are changing. Using digital tools that provide multiple modes (i.e., visual, auditory, and kinesthetic) for easily representing meaning has led to new ways of using and creating texts” (p. 72). In addition, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the San Antonio Writing Project (SAWP) also support this shift in literacy practices through multimodal approach in teaching and learning.

5. Oral Presentation and Articulation

With a multimodal approach, it may be easier and interesting for students, especially international students, to present their brochures in class. Their affective filters (Kreshen, 1988) remain low because they are presenting a topic that is familiar to them. The presenter has both prior knowledge and first-hand deep understanding of the subject matter compared to classmates because the topic is culturally relevant and contextual to the presenter. The student presenters may also be comfortable with the vocabulary because those words on the brochure are familiar and have a cultural connection to them.

I do not assign specific (prescriptive) topics; instead, I leave it to students to choose. I only require students to adhere to a topic that is culturally relevant to them. Culturally relevant topics (1) activate students' prior knowledge, (2) provide a context to learning, (3) enhance confidence with presentation or sharing, (4) help students take pride in the content, and (5) build confidence in sharing.

Prior knowledge is the students' ability to articulate a topic based on what they already know. According to Roschelle (1994), prior knowledge dismisses teacher controlled "models of learning"; instead, it promotes student-led approaches to learning. Thus, teachers should focus on building on what students already know instead of introducing topics that are yet unfamiliar to students. Shor (1992) also supports student-centered learning: "In class, then, teacher-centered competitive pedagogy can interfere with the positive feeling many students need to learn" (p. 24). Therefore, emotionally appropriate and supportive learning is important for diverse students' confidence and progress.

Contextual learning is meaningful to students who are unfamiliar to U.S. classroom practices. Imel (2000) describes the three types of cognitive processes that occur with contextual learning: situated, social, and distributed. Situated cognition refers to prior knowledge and the context of its use. Social cognition follows Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural premise, where learners use their socio-cultural experiences to form new knowledge. Finally, distributed cognition is associated with relationships the learner builds in the classroom with the help of a cooperative curriculum (Arievtich, 2003).

International students are hesitant to present in a public setting. Some have asked me if they could just read the brochure instead of presenting using power point or prezi. I always begin

class announcing that they are the experts in the subject matter, so they should not have any reluctance while presenting the brochure. They also needed to be reminded that they were informing and educating the professor and classmates from different countries through the brochure presentations.

Students also take pride in sharing about their culture and background. This aspect is made clear when the presenters answer questions following the demonstrations. For example, culture bound words and concepts are discussed after the presentations, and the students can confidently describe those characteristics. Finally, I observed that some students wanted to share all the time after that first presentation since this exercise may have helped international students in building confidence with oral presentation. This confidence comes from using assignments that are culturally appropriate and enjoyable to students. The following figure illustrates the brochure process (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Culture Brochure - Learning and Teaching

I’ve chosen a few brochures designed by international students from different countries for the purpose of this article. The following brochures represent countries such as Honduras, Brazil, Korea, and Saudi Arabia. The students chose to design their brochures on topics including a vacation place, waterfalls, clothes, foods, and places of religious significance. All of these topics are based on specific experiences in the students’ life.

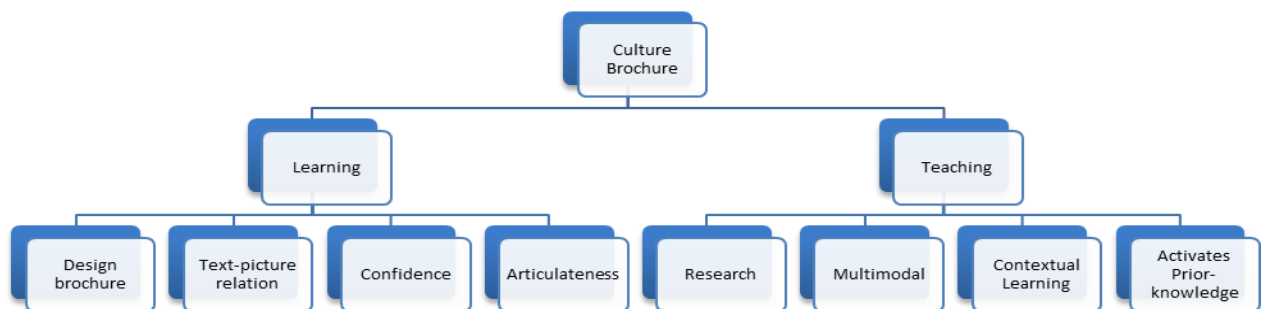


Figure 1: Culture Brochure Process

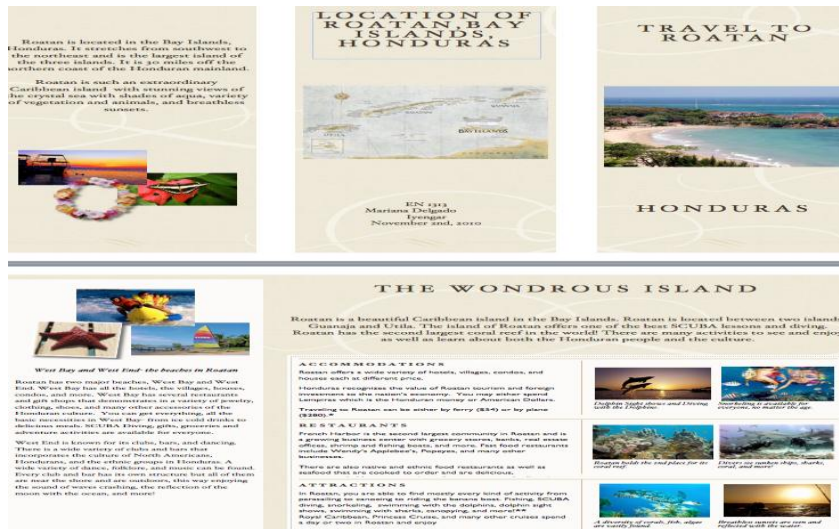


Figure 2: Honduras

This brochure is based on the students' empirical experience with traveling to the Roatan Island. This student was from Honduras, and she had visited the island many times. This brochure includes a map and provides relevant information tourists will need if they want to travel to Roatan in Honduras. The images comply with the description and help readers enjoy the brochure.



The falls on Argentina's side. (Unlabeled photograph). Retrieved March 29, 2013, from <http://www.touristtrips.com>

Although most of the major falls are located on Argentina's side, the best place to visit and to see the falls is on the Brazilian side, because you get to experience the most beautiful view and the best structure to view the falls safely.



The falls on the Brazilian side (Unlabeled photograph). Retrieved March 29, 2013, from <http://www.touristtrips.com>



The Iguazu Falls view with a rainbow (Unlabeled photograph). March 29, 2013, from <http://www.touristtrips.com>

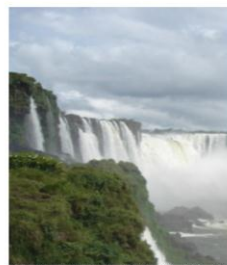
Who am I?
I am Marcella Giublin, an exchange student from Brazil, studying at St. Mary's University.

This Cultural Brochure would not be possible without the help of:

Kathe Lehman-Meyer
klehmanmeyer@stmarytx.edu

AND

Prof. Kalpana Iyengar
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(Unlabeled photograph). March 29, 2013, from <http://www.touristtrips.com>



Figure 3: Brazil

The Brazilian student chose to design a brochure about the Iguassu Falls in Brazil because of its natural grandeur.




What is 'Hanbok'?

Hanbok is the traditional Korean dress. It is often characterized by vibrant colors and simple lines without pockets. The Korean Hanbok represents one of the most visible aspects of Korean culture.

When we usually wear Hanbok?

Although the term literally means "Korean clothing", Hanbok today often refers specifically to Hanbok of Chosun Dynasty and is worn as semi-formal or formal wear during traditional festivals and celebrations.




History

The Korean Hanbok represents one of the most visible aspects of Traditional Korean clothing. Its roots extend back at least as far as the Three Kingdoms Period (57 B.C. - 668 A.D.), as evidenced by wall paintings in tombs dating from this period.

The origins of Hanbok can be found recorded on a wall painting of an ancient tomb of Goguryeo.

The basics of Hanbok are similar to the basic clothing of the northern horse-riding nomadic tribes, and were developed to be suitable for a cold climate and a nomadic life.



Traditional Korean Clothes

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Boys' Hanbok

Composition

Baji refers to the bottom part of the men's Hanbok. It is the formal term for 'pants' in Korean.

Do is a generic term referring to an outer robe or overcoat.




Now and After

The modern Hanbok does not exactly follow the actual style as worn in ancient dynasty since it went through some major changes during the 20th century for practical reasons.

Throughout history, Korea had a dual clothing tradition, in which rulers and aristocrats adopted different kinds of mixed foreign-influenced indigenous styles, while the commoners continued to use a distinct style of indigenous clothing that today is known as Hanbok.

References

<http://culture.korea.com/lookaround/12094>



Girls' Hanbok

Composition

Jogori is the basic upper garment of the Hanbok, which has been worn by both men and women. It covers the arms and upper part of the wearer's body.

Figure 4: Korean Clothes

The taste of Kimchi stew depends on how long the Kimchi has fermented

Usually people think, using the long time fermented Kimchi makes the taste of Kimchi stew more delicious. But obviously, the Kimchi depends on the person's liking. You need to adjust ingredients for making the Kimchi stew except the Kimchi. If you put the ToFu, onions and pork meat, the taste of the Kimchi stew will be much better. The most famous place for the Kimchi Stew is the street of Jongno.

The Korean spicy food

Koreans usually enjoy their spicy food. Below, I will show you three of the most famous spicy food in Korea.

JJOMMUK CHOO
전지식
Fast Food



<http://jjeonary.com/>

TEOKBOKKI

The Teokbokki, rice cakes in hot sauce, is very popular in Korea. Many Koreans love eating this food as a snack. Specifically, young adults love this food because of the strong and spicy taste. The low cost also allows young adults to afford to buy this food easily. You can easily make this food. All you need to make is rice cakes for the Teokbokki, fish cakes, onions and pepper for the hot sauce. If you want to eat the Teokbokki in sweet sauce, just add a little more sugar. The most famous place for the Teokbokki is the street of Sindang-dong.



BIBIMBAP

Many Koreans from young children to older people love the Bibimbab. People love this food not only because of the delicious, spicy taste but also because of the simple recipe for making it. It is very easy to make the Bibimbab. The ingredients for the Bibimbab are rice, lettuce, hot sauce and any kinds of herbs. Choosing herbs depends on the person's liking. Usually people love to eat bracken and bean sprouts. People usually eat the Bibimbab after the Korean holidays like Chuseok or Lunar New Year's day. There are many restaurant herbs after the holidays. This is the reason why people make the Bibimbab with restaurant ingredients. The most famous place for the Bibimbab is the street in the Jondae area.



KIMCHI STEW

Usually, the Kimchi stew is prepared from fresh Kimchi for making Kimchi stew. The Kimchi is a very health vegetable, so the Kimchi stew is also a healthy food. The taste of the Kimchi stew depends on the taste of the Kimchi. If the Kimchi is fermented for a long time, the taste of the Kimchi stew will be less spicy and sweeter than the Kimchi stew made by the short fermented Kimchi.



Figure 5: Korean Foods

The Korean students chose to design their brochures based on traditional Korean clothes and spicy foods from Korea.

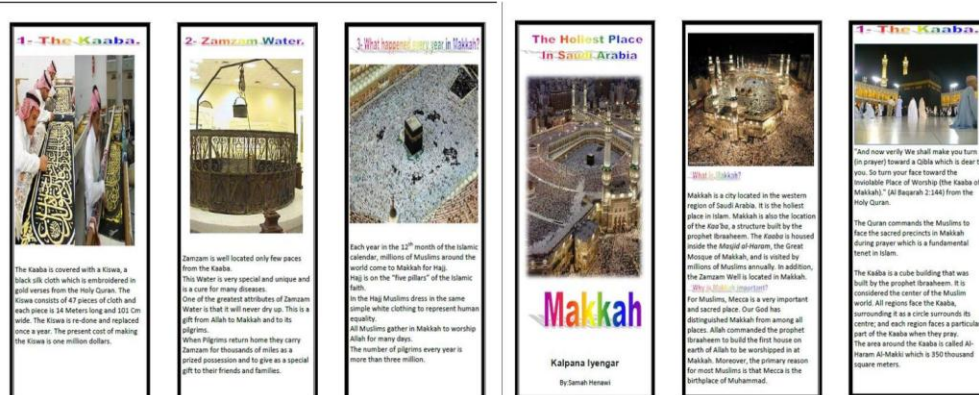


Figure 6: Saudi-Arabia

The Saudi-Arabian student was passionate to inform his peers about the holy place of pilgrimage called Mekkah in Saudi-Arabia.

Conclusion

The use of the culture brochure motivated international students to provide information about their cultural background using a multimodal approach. The oral presentation of the brochure encouraged public speaking and sharing in international students who were new to the U.S. and the English language. The professor has to be careful when it comes to giving agency to students on cultural topics because of some students' cultural and religious sensitivity to the topics.

The use of the brochure in the Rhetoric and Composition college classroom enabled international students to learn about brochure design, multimodal production, and the incorporation of text-picture format to present their culture based on prior knowledge, context, and experiences with the student-led topics. Ultimately, this assignment facilitated emotional literacy in diverse international students in the U.S.

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Appendix A – Culture Brochure Assignment

I begin the culture brochure-teaching assignment by displaying a few sample brochures from students from the previous semesters. I also provide the students with a model brochure on the class wiki, so students can refer to the same while brainstorming for their own. Students participate in a group discussion, so they can list a few topics for the unit. The students share the list with each other, and I then request that the students post the list on their wiki page, so everyone can learn about the different topics the students are thinking about. Next, the professor describes the purpose of the culture brochure.

The scheme of this assignment is to inform and learn from each others' cultures and incidentally learn to articulate views by sharing topics using a multimodal approach in a public space. Then, students are involved in researching about the format, layout, and structure of a brochure. The professor explains the different kinds of templates available on Microsoft word. The trifold brochure is the most popular design students choose for this culture brochure, so we discuss what a tri-fold is and how to locate it.

The next step is for the librarian to come to class and discuss research skills and the text-picture relationship. The professor guides the students outside of class in one-on-one conference

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sessions by providing input about the content and the pictures the student has chose for the brochure. Finally, students write extensively about the chosen topic in a writing workshop class, so they can incorporate their thoughts in the actual brochure. The professor guides the students once again in another face-to-face conference session so the text is in compliance with the images. The students go to the writing lab for editing help before they submit their draft brochures for feedback from the professor. After the students get feedback, they practice their oral presentation on their own. Students who have difficulties managing the presentation go to the professor so they can rehearse the brochure with the professor individually. By following these steps, students become confident to present in the classroom.

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