

Student-Generated Materials: Making Content, Community, and Culture Meaningful

Session Goals:

- Understand the advantages of student-created materials and how content, community, and culture are naturally integrated.
- Explore examples of such materials.
- Use these examples as a springboard for discussing ways to use student-generated materials in your own classes.

Let Students Make Their Own Fishing Rods! (A Story)

Advantages of student-generated materials:

- Student created activities provide authentic communicative tasks that engage students and make students active participants in their own learning.
- The teacher can focus more on supporting and encouraging students with less materials preparation to do.
- Content, Community, and Culture are natural parts of student-generated materials:

Content:

- Learners internalize content thoroughly because they select topics that are relevant to their interests and goals.
- In sharing materials with others, knowledge is reinforced.

Community:

- Learner-created materials require a group effort in which all members are contributing and negotiating.
- Success is shared, creating a bond among students.
- Students have a greater empathy for their classmates' challenges

Culture:

- Students have a platform for illustrating their culture for others while also having opportunities to explore their classmates' cultures.

Examples of student-generated materials:

1. Flash Cards

In partners, students use magazines to cut out images. Glue pictures to one side of an index card, and on the other side, write the name of the object and/or a linguistic target (such as a specific grammatical point). Now students have flashcards! These can be used to:

- Review vocabulary or grammar by flashing the cards
- Spontaneously create sentences that incorporate the grammar and the vocabulary
- Play “pictionary” with the images on the cards, then review the object’s name and/or grammar

Student-created flash cards are great because even beginners can create them.

2. Pronunciation Practice

Students prepare a speech on a topic of interest that must include a specific number of occurrences of a pronunciation target. As they give their speech, their classmates must listen for and write down the words with the target sounds while also thinking of one comment or question about the content. Learners hone their sound identification skills in their preparation and listening, and they also get to practice producing the sounds during their speech and in the post-speech review.

3. Grammar: Picture and Sentence match up

Students choose a given number of pictures from magazines, then write a sentence about each picture using the target form. Cut out the pictures and sentences. Place all pictures on one table and tape the sentences randomly around the room. Students must match them up, checking with the writer (students write their names on the back of their pictures and sentences). This gives grammar practice to both the writer and the matcher.

4. Board Games

Games are always fun in class, but when students design them, they are much more beneficial. Virtually any vocabulary or grammatical structure can be used in a game. Students created a game board that includes various steps, penalties, and card draws. The cards have sentences with blanks that have to be filled in with the target forms. These games make grammar or vocabulary review a little more bearable.

5. Reading

Using either student or teacher-selected articles based on class interests, learners create their own reading materials. In small groups students work with the teacher to understand key vocabulary and grammar, and once they feel confident in their understanding, they write questions for their classmates to answer after they too read the article. Questions can include vocabulary questions using a fill-in-the-blank format, comprehension questions based on facts from the reading, and discussion questions that encourage students to internalize the information and make cultural connections.

6. Vocabulary

Students select the vocabulary they feel is useful to them from readings or listenings. They create a list that can be used for:

- Constructing meaningful dialogs that incorporate target vocabulary.
- Vocabulary focused trivia games designed by the students.
- Make a board game similar to those explained under 'Grammar Game' (below), but with the cards describing the word to be guessed.

7. Writing

Students write a guide for other students. The guide could be a Portland city guide, a restaurant guide, a university survival guide, a book guide...the possibilities are endless!

8. Reading/Writing

After reading an article from a text, have students do further research on the content. They then make their own article for other students to read, complete with vocabulary, comprehension, and discussion questions.

For example, the class read about the cuisines of different areas of the U.S. Then in pairs they researched the cuisine(s) of a country of their choice and wrote an article complete with pictures and questions. These articles are then read and analyzed in class.

9. Listening/Speaking

Films and TV shows are excellent ways to mesh content with culture. By creating their own discussion topics, students can explore issues that matter to them such as marriage customs, work place etiquette, gender roles, etc. Rather than the teacher choosing which topics are discussion-worthy, the students focus on the issues important to their lives.

10. Listening/Speaking

Lectures and conversations can easily be expanded on. For example, after listening to an academic lecture about the geography and natural resources of North America, students create their own lecture about their country's land and products. They must also include a map to illustrate their points. Students listen to each others' presentations in small groups and practice the note-taking strategies learned in class. Finally they respond to the information in a group conversation.

Considerations:

- Student-created materials are more difficult to integrate in beginning level classes, but it's possible.
- In giving control of materials creation to the students, teachers must more than ever be a strong facilitator who provides careful guidance.
- Some students are hesitant about learner-generated activities. Teachers need to give these students extra support.

Discussion:

- Which of these activities would you use in your classes? How would you adapt them to fit the needs of your students? Can you share some examples of student-generated materials that you've used in class?

If you have further questions or comments, please contact me:

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Thank you for your participation today ☺