

Learning about Values and Language

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It is a truth universally acknowledged that an English class is as much about culture and values as it is about language. The problem is making students see that connection for themselves. One solution that I have hit on is values clarification exercises.

Values clarification exercises, as SB Simon (at mini.education.ucsb.edu) notes, do not teach values; they make students aware of their own values and the values of other people and other cultures. The hope is that as student awareness increases, they will reconsider their own values: perhaps change them if the values are seen to be poorly founded, or, hold them more confidently as the values have stood the test of review and comparison.

For teachers, there are a few pointers:

- The matters being discussed should be related to real issues confronting students.
- The activities should make students take a clear position about their values.
- The values discussed should not let students be made fun of.
- The students should be given time and language to explain or give reasons for the values they hold. This is the clarification part of the exercise.

These rather abstract considerations are easily understood with an example from an English class I teach to nursing students. I start by observing that clients sometimes do things that they shouldn't and behave in ways that interfere with treatments. The question is, what do you think a nurse should do in these situations? Agree or disagree with the following statements. Use this scale: 1 = agree strongly; 2 = agree; 3 = disagree; 4 = disagree strongly.

A nurse should criticize (注意する) a client if the client _____.	
a.	1 2 3 4 delays going to the clinic
b.	1 2 3 4 drinks a lot of alcohol
c.	1 2 3 4 has unprotected sex

I give them time to think about their positions and make notes about the vocabulary and grammar structures they need to explain their values. They then talk matters over with

students around them, helping each other with English, exploring reasons and developing their thinking. This can take ten minutes or more.

Once students have a sense of their positions and a basic grasp of what lead them to it, I offer a couple of English functions to facilitate discussion (for example, asking opinions and expressing agreement,). The EFL part done, I ask them to stand and talk to other students around the room, students they are not necessarily familiar with. To build fluency, I have them do this two or three times, each time shortening the length of time allowed to exchange information. To end the exercise, students return to their seats and compile rough data sets about the most common answers and report it to me. In this exercise, most of the time, almost all students opt for "1" or "2," the nurse should criticize the misbehaving client.

At this point, I raise cross-cultural issues and ask students to look at the exercise again, in particular the word "criticize." We come to a shared understanding that it is a harsh word in both Japanese and English. I observe that caregiving in Japan is very different than it is in the US, where I am from. I note that I have asked the exact same questions of several nurses and doctors I know in the US. Then I report that all of them answered "4," a nurse should never criticize a client's behaviors. The nurse should explain, educate, teach, help the patient understand, work with the patient on the matter – but never criticize. I don't say the Japanese value of criticism is wrong, just that it is different from the American and is used with a very different set of patients.

I don't expect miracles. Any one exercise is a minor point. But done often and done in ways that connect with students' own goals and interests, these value clarification exercises have proven useful, in English teaching, in helping students come to a better sense of their own values, and in recognizing the values of others, Japanese and foreign. This is a lesson that every nurse, and every student, should learn.