**USING FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES TO
ENHANCE CLASSROOM LEARNING**

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a short paper presentation conducted on February 23rd, 2013, at the 9th Annual CamTESOL conference on Language and Empowerment in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The presentation was intended to share one teacher's experience using ethnographic fieldwork techniques as a means of informing class content and engaging students' active participation with issues in her Gender and Sexuality class at Kanda University of International Studies. No formal research was conducted on the efficacy of using fieldwork. Rather, the intention of this paper is to discuss the practical considerations of using fieldwork as learner-generated content as well as its pedagogical implications for student empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

What is a 'fieldwork activity'? For my purposes, I defined it as any task that students can perform outside of class which is intended to do at least one of the following:

- make concepts introduced in class visible and real in students' own environments.

- give students a chance to bring in interesting ideas or objects into the classroom for analysis and discussion.

- value and empower students' background knowledge and engage critical thinking skills

- awaken students to ways they participate in, influence, and change their own culture and language.

As fieldwork is the principle method of ethnography, and thus a means to incorporate culture learning in with the language classroom, both the students and the teacher can examine cultural

frames of reference that influence their communication in the classroom (Damen 1987; Gonzalez et. al, 2005; Corbett 2003). In that sense, it is a tool for teachers and students to better understand where the other is coming from culturally. The students are not doing true fieldwork as a professional anthropologist would. They are only being introduced to basic techniques of observation, note-taking, and analysis as can be applied to the students' own cultural contexts in practical and personal ways (Damen, 1987; p. 63). As a teacher, my expectations are not that my students master these techniques, but that they understand how they can be valuable to their own independent inquiry as social actors. When students learn how to read the messages they receive from the world around them: through media, through the written word, through daily interactions with peers, they gain a critical understanding necessary in order to rationally accept or reject the evidence of their belief systems. In other words, ethnographic fieldwork, as a method of developing critical consciousness, has transformational potential.

2.   BACKGROUND

The impetus for using fieldwork came from sharing ideas with a colleague, who suggested that I have my students do 'challenges' to help demonstrate important concepts in class. Inspired by that, I took the term and applied it to the name 'fieldwork challenge' to evoke for my students the idea that they would perform a task or experiment that would be 'in the field': the realm of their lived experience; and that the task would not only be a challenge to accomplish, but also a challenge to the students' perceptions of themselves and their own culture.

2.1 Procedure

It should be noted that the procedure I will explain here for administering fieldwork activities has evolved over two years of teaching the course, through trial and error. Though the administration procedure has largely been standardized, the fieldwork activities themselves are edited nearly every semester to clarify terms and correlate with the changing course content. Before the start of the semester, I prepare three sets of 5 'fieldwork challenges' for the students to complete. Since there are three units in the course, students are required to choose one challenge per unit, to be completed in a group of three or four people. About a week into a new unit, I devote some time in class to signing up for these activities. A copy of the five fieldwork challenges is distributed to each student so that they may read and understand what is expected of them. I give them time to discuss which challenges seem interesting to them and to ask any questions they may have. After that, I ask the class pick their top three preferred fieldwork challenges, and to group themselves according to their first choice. In order to keep topics varied and interesting, I limit the number of groups that can do the same challenge to only two. Usually, there are one or two challenges that most want to do, but unfortunately, some have to fall back on their second or third choices in order to keep an even and varied distribution of topics.

Once the class has been divided into groups, I record their names and fieldwork choices onto a roster (see appendix), and subsequently they are given time to exchange contact information and devise a plan for completion. The descriptions of the fieldwork give instructions as to how they can approach data collection, but the students are free to negotiate those terms if their daily circumstances are restrictive. Besides the initial assignment period, the students have only one other opportunity during class time to negotiate their plans and corroborate data, which

is a week after sign-up. The rest of their time to gather and analyze data must be done independently outside of class.

Students are required to write up their groups' notes, analyses, and reflections in a single Microsoft Word document and post it to the Edmodo class webpage for everyone to access. In a 5-week unit, the deadline for the submission of their fieldwork data is the class day before the day of their presentations, which I specified in order to give myself and the students an opportunity to download and review the material before they discuss it in class. On the day of presentations, students sit with their fieldwork groups and plan how they are going to speak about their data. They may also share their work with other groups who are doing the same challenge. Presentations are impromptu and brief, meant to give everyone a summary understanding of the fieldwork challenge and the results the groups obtained. At the end of their presentation, each group asks the class a discussion question based on the results of the fieldwork. The discussion question is very important since it is a chance for the group to relate their fieldwork to the course content and find out what their classmates' opinions are. Presenters are given responsibility to discuss and report the connections between the results, course content, and their own experiences themselves, and then elicit responses from the class.

2.2 The Fieldwork Challenges

The fieldwork challenges are designed to move students from their insider *emic* perspectives to detached, outsider *etic* perspectives. The first purpose of which is to make what is perceived as 'normal', and thus invisible to the students, visible (Damen 1987; Garfinkel 1967; Fetterman 2010). This means students must be compelled by the nature of the task to attend to various aspects of their own culture, what Moran (2001) calls "products, practices, and

perspectives". Products are defined as tangible cultural artifacts such as photographs, clothing, comic books, etc. Practices refer to behavior, and perspectives refer to ideologies and belief systems that motivate the use of products and practices.

One fieldwork challenge that attends to practices asks students to collect compliments that are overheard from others in one's environment. This was a suggested activity taken from the Gender Awareness in Language Education (GALE) special interest group website. This activity lends itself well to not only analyzing the sociolinguistic structure of compliments, but also to looking at the ways in which gender roles may be positively reinforced through seemingly innocuous, yet value-laden judgments. Other fieldwork activities have been to observe how parents interact with their children in public settings; to conduct surveys and interviews on gender-related topics; to collect samples of and analyze gendered images and advertisements in the environment; and to observe the reactions from peers after changing one's behavior or appearance in a gendered way.

Another challenge asks that students spend the whole day at KUIS wearing some form of clothing or makeup that is typical of the gender opposite to that with which they identify. The key is 'gender', not 'sex'. Therefore, even if a student is biologically female, but socially identifies as male and wears masculine clothing, then she is asked to wear feminine clothing or makeup. In order to minimize potential trauma from shame or embarrassment, students may dress up as much or as little as they feel comfortable with. Of those who selected this challenge, some had chosen to wear full outfits; some had only put on eyeliner. As these students went through their day, they were to note down the range of reactions they received from people at the school and analyze them with their group members.

To help students make sense of the data they collect, in-class lectures and activities focus on topics that are relevant to the fieldwork. I provide background reading from which class discussion can be prompted. In the case of the aforementioned fieldwork example, one class talked about a New York Times article concerning young boys dressing up in girls' clothing, much to the anxiety of their parents (Padawer, 2012). From that discussion, the idea of double standards between genders emerged, as parents were not nearly as upset when their daughters dressed in boy's clothing. The discussion surrounding the article could then be applied to the interpretation of the fieldwork. To see more examples of specific fieldwork activities, please see samples of fieldwork sign-up sheets provided in the appendix.

3. DISCUSSION

In my presentation at CamTESOL, I highlighted some of the potential drawbacks and potential rewards of adding fieldwork activities to a curriculum, based on my experiences and student feedback. For teachers who prefer a clear evaluation structure in place, open-ended fieldwork activities done in groups may prove difficult to assess. One reason is that effort and accountability cannot be discerned easily. One student in the group may have done most of the work for everyone, or conversely, perhaps three out of four group members consistently met and stayed in contact with each other while one group member played absentee. To address this problem, I added the "planning sheet" as a scaffold in the administration procedure towards assessing effort. As explained before, this is the only time in class besides the sign-up phase when all group members can plan and corroborate data together. These planning sheets ask students to report about their current plans, their efforts so far, their intentions, and if they need

any help to complete the project. This gives students a chance to catch up with group members who have been absent and organize their fieldwork completion schedules. Since every group member is responsible for their part as indicated in the planning sheet, it is hoped that this will improve accountability and quality of their fieldwork results. Of course, further research would need to be done to discern if they are proven to help.

Other potential hurdles have been: some students missing the point of the fieldwork challenges entirely; some students not asking for help when they should; and students expressing difficulty in interpreting the meaning of their results. Teachers can decide how best to address these issues in their own classes. In my case, it was a matter of refining the wording of the fieldwork challenge descriptions in order to make them more specific and comprehensible; adding more planning time in class in order to check on the students' progress and answer their questions; and in general, enriching the content of the course to provide the students enough background information to interpret their fieldwork results cogently.

The above difficulties notwithstanding, students have demonstrated profound realizations from completing their fieldwork challenges, particularly with regard to awareness of how their own behavior is gendered, the influence of society and culture on their gender identities, and awareness of double standards and prejudices - both on personal and political levels. One student who chose to change her appearance to the opposite of her gender identity for one day reported about her experience in her journal.

> I did the field work challenge 9. I usually wear men's clothes and I don't wear makeup, so I wore makeup at university. My friends helped me to do this filed work challenge because I don't know how to make up. After I wore makeup, my friends said looked good, pretty and more feminine. Boys said 'what happened to you?' and 'I would fell in love with you' and 'you should wear makeup often because look better than no makeup'. However, after I wore makeup, I felt strange and uncomfortable. Also, I didn't want to

see my face through a mirror. I have an image that girls got confidence after wearing makeup, but I didn't feel confidence. For some reason, I felt embarrassed. I should have felt happy when they told me pretty or beautiful or something, but I never felt like that. I like boyish style, and I want to be cool like man so I thought I felt uncomfortable. I don't have much information of this challenge because I did this field work challenge for one day and just makeup about 3 hours, so I will try again next week…

Another student, who completed a fieldwork challenge that asked students to perform some task or behavior that is normally attributed to the opposite of their identified gender, had this to say in his results report:

> In my opinion, one of the non-traditional roles for men is handling household accounts. I have never tried it in my life. However, a few weeks ago, one of my friends gave me a notebook of it so I was interested in it. I found some receipts from my wallet and I could see my payments for a week. Even at that time, I could not remember what I bought a week ago. There were sometimes strange receipts and I found that I paid more than what I expected. Furthermore, in total, there was a big difference between the sum of my receipts and my present all money. I guess I did not count how much I spent at Lapaz because they do not gave us receipt. I was so shocked because I had spent too much more what I thought. I must say it is good to know my payments. I used to believe handling household accounts is not for men but now I think I have to do them (especially because I am living alone).

As a last example, one girl reported two small "breaching" experiments, as I call them, since they seem, to me, reminiscent of Garfinkel's work (1967). Garfinkel's primary interest was in discovering the processes and procedures that produce and enact social orders. He believed that by breaching, or transgressing, assumed and enacted orders, the limits and extent to the order could be revealed and further understood. In the following excerpt, the student reveals how quietly performing, and not performing, certain actions unattributed to her sex could lead to upsetting consequences, which inspired her to further reflect on the social boundaries of gendered behavior in Japanese society.

Firstly, I would like to write the observed result which is acting like a man at my house. Usually, my sister and I set the table for meals and my father just waits and sits on chair. So this time, I just sat my chair and waited my meals. Mother said nothing until finish setting the table. However, before start to eat lunch, she asked me why you are angry. I really surprised because I was not angry with anyone and I didn't act like angry.

Secondly, I will explain second test which is eating Gyu-don alone. I've ate it at Yoshino-ya more than 4 times with my friends however, I've never been to there alone. Now, I just want to say it was awkward. When I entered there alone, there were only men and they glanced to me (not once, more than twice!). The atmosphere was uncomfortable.

I can say from the above two tests, there is evidence that we live and act within limited "appropriate" behaviors as a man or woman. If a female doesn't do housework, society would say it's not appropriate as a woman. If a girl went to eat ramen, gyu-don and yakiniku alone, may be society would recommend that she goes to a café alone instead. When we compare the current society and the society from more than 5 decades' ago, actually we can say society has changed and females and males live more comfortably than before. However, still there are expected roles and behaviors as male and female.

In such cases, the most rewarding aspect of the fieldwork challenges is that the students come to conclusions on their own. They may expect certain results, but it is never guaranteed that they will find them. Some students emerge from their experiences feeling shocked and bewildered, while some feel more certain of their own convictions. Whatever their results may be, the fieldwork clearly afforded the students, and myself, the opportunity to reflect on some of the assumed boundaries that define our social experience.

4. CONCLUSION

It would be impossible, nor desirable, to divorce a class on gender studies from social and political realities in which the students and the teacher are situated. As I am coming from a different historical and cultural perspective than my students, I am aware that my own ideological views on gender politics can influence my lectures. Therefore, it is a personal challenge of mine to refine my own pedagogical practices to eliminate imposing dogma as a figure of authority in the classroom (a feat made more difficult in cultures where the students themselves have come to accept the teacher as the only authority in the classroom). Freire states that "it is contradictory to proclaim progressive politics and then to practice authoritarianism or opportunism in the classroom," (1986, p. 216). Similarly, Giroux (2005) underscores the problem of teachers who inadvertently promote the ideologies they seek to overturn by providing curriculum materials that represent their own viewpoints. "Rather than responding with gratitude for being politically enlightened," he writes, "the students respond with scorn and resistance." To avoid such pedagogical mires, fieldwork can be a useful method that gives students the opportunity to encounter and problematize previously unnoticed or accepted cultural practices, institutions, and belief systems independently. When these issues are brought into the classroom for discussion, students are more motivated to share their experiences and compare perspectives because the incentive to do so is not only coming from the teacher or grades; it is coming from the students' own curiosity and growing sociopolitical awareness. In that way, fieldwork has great potential to help students develop the 'intellectual discipline' required to engage with their world in an active and critical fashion, on their own terms and in their own words.

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6. APPENDIX

First Set – Choose one, due by April 24th: Gender and Sexuality Concepts
1. Write about switching gender roles. Choose a chore around the house, or a type of action that is not usually done by someone of your gender and complete the task without explaining why. After completing the task, describe what you did; explain how it made you feel; and tell how others reacted to your efforts. Post your analysis on Edmodo. An example task could be: use masculine/feminine speech patterns; sit with your legs crossed/open wide; cook a meal/do laundry/babysit; eat a meal alone at a ramenya, etc…
2. Interview a foreign student or teacher about their views on gender roles for about 10 minutes. Ask permission to record the interview and upload the audio to Edmodo. See me for sample questions, but you should create your own as well. Lead a discussion about the interview.
3. Collect compliments. Write down any compliments you hear or overhear from teachers, parents, and peers. Categorize comments by gender and then look at what each gender is complimented on or appreciated for. Present it as a chart on Edmodo.
4. Create a short survey asking participants whether they think people's genders are biologically determined or socially constructed. Ask them **why** they think that way. Tally your results, analyze them, and post them on Edmodo for discussion.
5. Capture public images you come across in your daily life of men and women of various ages. Take photos of them and compile them. Such images can be from trains, on the street, on storefronts, in magazines you usually read, on TV you normally watch, anywhere you go in your usual routine. **Do not actively change** what you do and where you go just to find images. Write an analysis of the images. What are the common ways that men and women are depicted? Why are they depicted that way?

6.1   *Fieldwork Challenge Sign-Up*

If you wish to create your own fieldwork challenge, please email your ideas to me.
IMPORTANT: When doing these challenges, be careful and use your best judgment and sensitivity to others.

Group Sign-up Sheet

Names   *Challenge Number*

Group 1:	
Group 2:	
Group 3:	
Group 4:	
Group 5:	
Group 6:	

6.2 Planning Sheet

Which Fieldwork Challenge are you doing?_____   **Due Date:_____**

What will each person in your group do?

Name	Role/Job

What have YOU done so far?

What do you still need to do? When and how will you do it?

What help do you need to complete your FWC?

_____