

論文

Teaching American Society to Japanese Students using an Active Learning Syllabus

日本人学生がアメリカ社会を学ぶためのアクティブ・ラーニングシラバス

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Abstract

In recent years, the push to incorporate Active Learning into university classes in Japan has become increasingly strong, and various books, reports, and internet resources have been published to help the inexperienced teacher understand the whys and hows of Active Learning. This report explains a partial class syllabus for teaching Japanese students about American society and culture using mainly Active Learning methodologies, and reviews its implementation to discover problems and possibilities for improvement.

For the first Jig-Saw round, students in 5-person groups learned about particular population groups in America (African Americans, Native Americans, European immigrants, Asian immigrants, Women), then joined each group's history into a 6-meter timeline poster, after which each student explained their group's history to others in a new group using the timeline. For the second Jig-Saw round, students in each group worked together to create a poster on a specific issue in the US, and then participated in a poster presentation round in which individual members of each group formed new 'peer presentation groups' and took turns explaining their poster to the other people in this new group.

要約

近年の日本では、アクティブ・ラーニングが高等教育で注目され、これからの大学教育には欠かせないものとなってきたが、それを用いて教えることは未経験者にとってはかなり難しいため、多数の参考書などが出版されている。この論文もその一つで、山口県立大学での講義の一部を例としてあげて、具体的にアクティブ・ラーニング仕法での授業デザインを説明し、実施、成績評価の方法と、改善点について述べる。

最初の4週間タームでは、人種・人口グループ（アフリカン・アメリカン、ネイティブ・アメリカン、ヨーロッパ系移民、アジア系移民、女性）に分かれて、5人グループでそれぞれの人種・人口グループの歴史を調べ、出来事カードをタイムラインに貼った。その後、各グループから一人ずつ集めて、お互いのグループ歴史を他グループのメンバーに教える。次の4週間タームではアメリカか抱えている諸課題（教育、フード、LGBT、高齢社会、アメリカン・ドリーム、タトゥー）を取り上げ、同じようにグループで課題を理解したのち、ポスターを作製し、別グループを作って、他のメンバーに説明していくようにした。

Introduction

In recent years, with students' concentration abilities going down and the rapid changes in society making it difficult for younger students to understand the contents of lecture-based courses, one-way teaching (teaching only from teacher to student) has become more and more difficult in both Japan and the United States. Students are no longer accustomed to listening and taking notes for a long period of time, they have more difficulty understanding the abstract concepts laid out in a lecture and need a more hands on approach.

Many researchers have shown that students are able to retain more and stay more engaged with learning when using active methods such as discussion, project-based learning, and pair, partner or group work. Group work and interactive learning has been promoted in the language learning curriculum for many years (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986; Fried-Booth, 1986; Nunan, 1988), and in the United States, the use of active learning in one's classroom is often critical to an instructor's career advancement (Seldin et al, 2008).

In Japan, the Central Education Council of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) first introduced the concept of "active learning" in a document published in 2012 regarding the improvement in quality necessary for university education in Japan in order to make it more competitive on a global level, and in 2014, began to encourage its use in the high school, junior high school, and elementary school curriculums (Matsubara, 2015). Since then, the term has become very familiar, but many instructors are hesitant to use it, and those who are used to giving lectures are wary of it because they feel they must 'give up control' of their classroom and syllabus. This report aims to show how an instructor can use active learning methods to teach a portion of a university social sciences class that was originally considered to be a lecture course, and how control and structure can be maintained to ensure the students are getting the necessary information that they should.

As previously mentioned, classes teaching culture or society at Japanese universities are typically lecture courses in which the instructor has a list of topics, themes and social concepts which need to be conveyed to students in order to allow them to gain an overall concept of that culture or society as a whole. But in an area of Japan where students have limited contact with other cultures and societies, the first aim of this class should rather be to help students gain a 'feel' for, what was in this case American culture and society, after which they can then go on to develop their vocabulary and knowledge of social constructs and the differences between cultures and countries. This is where teaching through Active Learning methods can be very beneficial.

This paper will describe a partial syllabus for an course teaching students about the United States, which uses Active Learning techniques to keep students fully engaged and helps them to retain more about what they learned in each class and throughout the semester. It also reviews components such as self-review, peer-review, teacher grading, and group work in an effort to keep the class manageable for the teacher. Finally, it explains the difficulties with this syllabus and how it could possibly be improved upon.

Active-Learning Term One (Four weeks)

One of the main features of an active learning class is group work. In particular, the use of the Jig Saw methods that are explained here is helpful because each student is responsible for their own 'piece' of the puzzle, and in preparing their own part, they gain basic knowledge about the topic and thus naturally become more willing and able to receive the 'pieces' of learning from other students. In addition, by having the students teach each other in small groups, they remain more fully engaged, and are able to ask and answer questions easily and without fear of being wrong or ridiculed, the way they might in a large classroom lecture.

This partial syllabus was basically a set of two separate Jig-Saw Learning Rounds, the first on "population groups" to help students to understand the basic fabric of American society and how difficult it is to define absolutely because of its mish-mash of cultures, histories and traditions. Students were assigned to one of five "population" groups - Native Americans, European immigrants, African Americans, Asian immigrants, and Women (other possible groups could be

Latin American or Hispanic, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (original European settlers), etc., and the number of groups should be increased or decreased according to the number of students in the class) (FIG 1). Each group had between four and six students per group, but generally five is the best number, because if a four-person group goes down to three with an absence, group work becomes difficult. Students will work in these groups for two or three weeks to build a timeline of their population group whose history, which, with the exception of WASPs, has been largely ignored in education and media even though they are influential in today's news, government, politics, education, etc.

FIG 1. Jig-Saw Round One: Expert Groups by Culture

Women	Asian Immigrants	European Immigrants	African Americans	Native Americans
W1	AI1	EI1	AA1	NA1
W2	AI2	EI2	AA2	NA2
W3	AI3	EI3	AA3	NA3
W4	AI4	EI4	AA4	NA4
W5	AI5	EI5	AA5	NA5

In the first week's class, students discuss what they know about their population group, use smart phones and tablets in class to find some basic information such as timelines and internet sites to give them more information on their assigned group. Then they divide up their tasks so that each student is responsible for finding out something different about their population group. For this timeline task, simply dividing responsibilities by time period made this very easy... students covered the period between 1776 and modern day America by dividing into 50-year periods and assigning them to each member of the group.

In the second week's class, students brought back their information, shared it with each other so that each member could get a feel for the overall history of their group, after which they chose 'main events' and divided the work so that each student was making an equal amount of 'key event' labels which could then be glued onto the long timeline poster in the appropriate time period. During this class time, the instructor went around the groups to see what the students had gathered so far, and to provide a list of resources that might be helpful to them. In addition, for those groups who seemed to be missing major concepts and/or events, the instructor explained these to the group and gave them hints as to where they could find more information to be relayed to others.

At the beginning of class in the third week, students spent about 30 minutes pasting their labels onto the long paper (about 7 meters) at the appropriate time period. and conferring with each other in preparation for teaching about their population group. Next, they were re-divided into presentation groups, with one person from each population group in each new group (FIG 2).

FIG 2. Jig-Saw Round One: Peer Presentation Groups

Peer Presentation Group 1	Peer Presentation Group 2	Peer Presentation Group 3	Peer Presentation Group 4	Peer Presentation Group 5
W1	W2	W3	W4	W5
AI1	AI2	AI3	AI4	AI5
EI1	EI2	EI3	EI4	EI5
AA1	AA2	AA3	AA4	AA5
NA1	NA2	NA3	NA4	NA5

They spent the rest of this class and about half of the following week’s class introducing the history of each population group to each other, asking questions and discussing the history of the US as a whole (PIC 1). When they finished doing this, they spent the second half of the fourth week’s class back in their original groups, discussing what kind of questions and feedback they had gotten and filling in evaluation forms regarding their personal group work performance (discussed later in this report). Finally, they wrote a short paper (3 pages, A4) on their population group and the history timeline as a whole in order to synthesize the information which they had gathered over the previous few weeks.

Picture 1 Pasting various groups histories on the timeline



Active-Learning Term Two (Four weeks)

The second Jig-Saw Round was fairly similar in design, but instead of focusing on population groups, each group focused on a particular issue that the class had decided they wanted to know more about. Issues chosen included Education, Food, Aging Society, LGBT, the American Dream, and Tattoos. Each group was given an issue and asked to research it in order to understand when and why it occurred, how the issue had progressed until recent times, and how it was projected to develop in the future. They divided their work so that each student was researching something

different, and came back and shared it in Week Two so that they all had an overall understanding of it, after which they were able to make a poster about their issue. With the general knowledge of the various different cultures based on their First Term Jig-Saw Round, the students were able to go into their topics with a basic knowledge of American population groups and their histories, and use that to develop their presentations. For Week Three, they made posters in and outside of class, and on Week Four, they divided into new groups once again and walked around to each poster with their group while the ‘expert’ of that particular issue explain about it to their group members. Again, following these presentations, they filled out Presentation Evaluations and personal evaluations (see below).

Grading and Evaluations in the Active-Learning Class

While there are various types of evaluations that can be done in an Active Learning class, it is most important to understand the learning objectives for the particular class before beginning in order to be sure that you are collecting the right kind of data to evaluate the students at the end of each learning period.

For these two terms in this semester-long course, the main goal was to learn through group work – having the students be conscious of the way they participated and whether that could improve over time if they made an effort. The secondary goal was the actual content of American Society, and for this portion, the instructor paid more attention to whether the students had grasped a general understanding of the subject and how things were changing and progressing, rather than focusing on whether the students had learned particular concepts and terms. Of course, concepts and terms are important, and the instructor spent the last few weeks in class going over some things that are vital to the understanding of American culture and society, but students were not graded specifically on how many of these terms or concepts they had remembered or could define. Besides the rubric grading below, students wrote a few mini-reports to synthesize and reflect on their learning.

For group work, students were given two rubrics for evaluation purposes. The first was an evaluation of their personal performance during their group work (FIG 3). For this evaluation, students were asked to evaluate their performance from four aspects: whether they were an active leader, encourager, contributor, and listener (Yoshida, 2015). This was very beneficial for the students, because it helped them realize that it wasn’t necessary to be a leader, but they could concentrate their efforts on gathering information and encouraging others to speak, rather than always feeling that they had to lead the group, thus allowing students to participate in the way which most suited them.

FIG 3 Rubric for Personal Performance during Groupwork

Student Number _____ Name _____

American Sociology Jig-Saw Round 1 : American Cultures and Societies Timeline Groupwork Personal Performance Evaluation Worksheet

Please evaluate your personal participation performance for this round of groupwork. For each area, circle the comment that comes closest to describing your overall performance in that area. Then, in the comment box below, explain what things you did particularly well this time, and what things you would like to make better in your next groupwork.

Personal Performance= How much effort you put into the assignment, how careful you are of your manners towards other teammates, how much you contributes to your teammates.

Evaluation Area	Superior level	Advanced level	Average level	Basic level
Participation in group discussions	You actively participate actively, giving constructive comments in order to further the discussion	You make comments and lead the discussion often	You make some comments related to the topic of discussion	You are attentive during the discussion
Encouraging other members to contribute to group discussions	You work actively to combine each members comments into a relevant discussion and enable each member to contribute equally to the groupwork	You work hard to organize other participants comments and further the discussion by adding your own, and actively encourage other member’s participation	You nod your head to agree with others and show your understanding and agreement with others	You don’t interrupt others, and listen carefully to what each person has to say
Your personal contributions to the groupwork	You actively participate in groupwork, and play a large role in contributing to a very well-formed solution of the problem/issue	You actively participate and contribute towards the solution of the problem/issue	You participate in the groupwork and cooperate to help the work progress smoothly	You participate in the groupwork, and help do any task assigned to you
Group/team atmosphere	You work actively to continually improve the atmosphere of the team, and when things start to become difficult, negotiate in a way to improve the atmosphere to make it better.	You support other members and actively make comments and act to improve the group’s atmosphere.	You work to behave and make comments that are in agreement with the other members and will help make the atmosphere good	You participate in the groupwork without making any comments or actions that might disrupt the atmosphere of the group

The second rubric was used at the end of the second term for evaluation both each individual student’s presentation skills along with evaluation of the group performance in developing and making the poster and learning about the topic (FIG 4). It is a very simple rubric for each presentation, with room for all six presentations on one page, so that students can easily carry it around and score the presentations as they are watching them. Using this Peer Presentation Rubric, students can judge each group as a whole using the scores from Q1 (about the coverage of the topic), and Q2 (about the effectiveness of the poster), and evaluate the individual scores for each presenter using Q3 (about the presentation skills of the speaker/s). They are also encouraged to write both positive comments and constructive feedback so that presenters understand clearly about why they got their particular scores and what they should do to improve them.

FIG 4. Jig-Saw Round Two: Peer Presentation Rubric

Your St No.: _____ Your Name: _____

Food	Learned about Topic:	Very much	A Fair Am	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All
	Poster Design/Content	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Work	Insufficient
	Presenter's skill	Excellent	Good	Fair	Need Wrokd	Insufficient
	Presenter's Name:	Things Well Done:			Things which could be improved upon	
American Dream	Learned about Topic:	Very much	A Fair Am	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All
	Poster Design/Content	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Work	Insufficient
	Presenter's skill	Excellent	Good	Fair	Need Wrokd	Insufficient
	Presenter's Name:	Things Well Done:			Things which could be improved upon	
LBGT	Learned about Topic:	Very much	A Fair Am	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All
	Poster Design/Content	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Work	Insufficient
	Presenter's skill	Excellent	Good	Fair	Need Wrokd	Insufficient
	Presenter's Name:	Things Well Done:			Things which could be improved upon	
Education	Learned about Topic:	Very much	A Fair Am	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All
	Poster Design/Content	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Work	Insufficient
	Presenter's skill	Excellent	Good	Fair	Need Wrokd	Insufficient
	Presenter's Name:	Things Well Done:			Things which could be improved upon	
Tattoos	Learned about Topic:	Very much	A Fair Am	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All
	Poster Design/Content	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Work	Insufficient
	Presenter's skill	Excellent	Good	Fair	Need Wrokd	Insufficient
	Presenter's Name:	Things Well Done:			Things which could be improved upon	
Seniors	Learned about Topic:	Very much	A Fair Am	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All
	Poster Design/Content	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Work	Insufficient
	Presenter's skill	Excellent	Good	Fair	Need Wrokd	Insufficient
	Presenter's Name:	Things Well Done:			Things which could be improved upon	

The Benefits of Using Active Learning Methods

The benefits of teaching what is usually considered to be a lecture course using active learning methods are two-fold: in terms of learning about American culture and society, students gain a feel for the country as a whole through learning extensively about a large number of topics from their peers, which makes it easier for the students to give feedback and opinions and ask questions about things they can't grasp. Each student can remain fully active in every class, and when acting in the role of 'expert', each student needs to have a good understanding of the concepts they are teaching in order to be able to convey it to their peers, so they remain fully engaged in the classes, to a greater degree than in lecture courses.

In terms of Active Learning, students learn social skills they will need later in the workplace - communication, active listening and participation, group work, etc., and are encouraged to reflect and improve upon these skills through the use of rubrics.

The Drawbacks of Using Active Learning Methods

In terms of the academic subject matter, teaching through Active Learning can make it difficult to fully control the content material, since the students are responsible for preparing for group work. As a result, the teacher cannot be sure whether each student got a full overview of American culture and society through the two terms, and/or how much of the content they retained. It is difficult to evaluate their factual knowledge through quizzes, as the other student teachers (experts) have been the ones to convey these facts.

These problems can be somewhat alleviated by having the teacher rotate around groups, providing guidance, explaining concepts and giving advice as to what areas should be covered more deeply, while still allowing the students feel that they have control over their work. In addition, assigning short reports to summarize the work that their group has done together can help students to pull together their knowledge and fill in any blanks that they still have.

Another problem that can occur is due to differences in student motivation. While students are acting as teachers on regular occasions, there are always students who go through the group work mechanically, simply listening passively during the group work and conveying the other group member's messages during their presentation time. This can be very demotivating to more active members, and teachers must pay attention to whether this is happening and give advice and direction to the inactive student.

Finally, in preparing the timeline using the different "population groups", it would probably have been more effective to also have a group representing "white American men" or "WASPs", in order to have a baseline timeline of the American history which one learns in history books and classes. Most Japanese university students lack in-depth knowledge of modern history, and many students had little or no knowledge of the Civil War, the Great Depression, and other major historical events which influenced American culture and society.

American Society Revisited

This report was based on a class taught in the fall of 2015, but in the class beginning in the fall of 2016, a few changes have been made. One of the major changes was to approach the questions that the students have at the beginning of the semester. The first day of class both years was used for brainstorming what the students already knew about America (Fall, 2015), and questions or things they wanted to know more about America and American society (Fall, 2016), but in the Fall 2016 class, students went directly into the first 4-week term, in which they developed presentation topics such as American Education, Discrimination, Guns, Sports, Money (tax & tips), Japanese Language Education in the U.S., Tobacco and Marijuana, and Food and Diet. By approaching the semester starting with the students' questions and interests, the class has been even more involved, and their poster presentations have been of even higher quality than in the previous year.

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