

CHILDREN AND ART:

UNCOVERING CULTURAL PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES THROUGH WORKS OF ART IN WORLD LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Dr. Jennifer Eddy, Queens College, City University of New York

“Anything you do, let it come from you--then it will be new.
Give us more to see.”

Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine in “Move On” from
Sunday in the Park with George (1984)

Introduction

The lyric above and the entire play capture how art uncovers and reveals truths while engaging us in change, not only in our understanding of our world but also in the personal process of creating new ideas or works of art from that inspiration. In our lifetime, recursive themes reprise and resurface, allowing us to spiral concepts, skills, and lessons learned, which we apply to different contexts and adjust to new situations. It is this flexibility and high adaptability that are required when faced with new situations in a culture. Predictable rules and rehearsal do not help us understand language and culture; it is exploration, participation and reflection that form new connections and experiences via continuous interaction along the life of the learner. The arts provide us with intentional engagement which creates a relationship involving a response to the art: our experiences, perceptions, concepts, and understandings within the art. Perspectives and ideas essential to a given culture can be uncovered in ways accessible to the youngest learner, prompting further inquiry and changes in perception. Those ideas can then be transferred or transposed through performance assessment. Works of art are culturally authentic materials made by and for the culture (Galloway, 1998) and like any authentic text, are essential in designing authentic performance assessment (Glisan, Adair-Hauck, Koda, Sandrock, & Swender, 2003).

Aesthetic Education

Maxine Greene states that the aesthetic experience is “brought into being by encounters with works of art” (2001, p. 5) and “a conscious participation in a work, a going-out energy, an ability to notice what is there to be noticed” (2005, p. 125). One of the goals of the aesthetic educational process is to engage teachers in a work of art, linking it and other human experiences, including social, historical, and cultural contexts (Greene, 2001). *Aesthetic Education* guides teachers to create these encounters with works of art for their students within a standards-based curriculum design (Fuchs-Holzer & Noppe-Brandon, 2005). Connecting to a work of

art through an aesthetic experience enhances the capacity of the young learner to construct meaning, resulting in expanding the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962). This process allows the teacher, and subsequently the young language learner, to explore ideas through multiple points of view (Holzer, 2005), expect unknowns and be flexible to them, and then transfer this understanding to performance tasks and activities that support the work of art and deepen inquiry into cultural practices and perspectives. (Eddy, 2007)

Uncovering Content via Cultural Practices and Perspectives

The model, *Uncovering Content* (UC ADAPT), aligns our standards to the *backward design* framework (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 2005) so that language instructors can unpack the standards and shift focus from textbook coverage to performance (Eddy, 2006a). The stages in the model are: assessment, design, alignment, performance and transfer.

UC ADAPT (Eddy, 2005, 2006a, 2007), is a curricular design model that reveals cultural practices and perspectives within recursive topics and themes as the focus of performance assessment evidence and selectivity of knowledge and skills. This design model uncovers content by unpacking the culture standard first, because cultural response to those topics in our syllabus drives the curriculum. Next, the communication standard determines the mode of assessment evidence. We use that standard and the three communicative modes to design the performance assessment tasks. From there, the teacher can make informed decisions on the knowledge and skills needed for that assessment and the instructional strategies and methodology that best match the desired result. UC ADAPT stands for Uncovering Content: Assessment Design Aligning Performance and Transfer. (Eddy, 2007) UC ADAPT also speaks to a feedback system which helps teachers plan to adjust, continuously informing their practice through assessment evidence. The framework is grown out of *Backward Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005).

Backward design (understanding by design) is a well-known design framework for many disciplines, but its adaptation to foreign language curriculum and assessment design with this particular alignment to the standards is unique (Eddy, 2006b). Backward design suggests that curriculum

should be designed with the following steps:

1. Identifying desired results with key understandings and inquiry in mind
2. Determining evidence and assessments students will perform to demonstrate those results along with the knowledge and skills particular for that assessment (Eddy, 2006)
3. Selecting the teaching and resources to guide students toward the performance goal (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 2005)

Because the assessment evidence is responsive to and demonstrative of the desired results set forth initially, the teacher has an honest account of what learners are able to do. This further informs practice, defining content and sequencing for subsequent classes and levels. Applied to language teaching and learning, these tenets lead specifically to the understandings we want learners to have and continue to build across their lifetimes, and to what authentic performance should look like. (Eddy, 2007) Even with the standards, instructors may fall prey to a textbook driven curriculum. Or, abandoning the textbook, they are tempted by the all-you-can-eat buffet of content, a potpourri of activities, thinking about assessment last. Teachers need to create performance-based assessment. Textbooks do not enable teachers to make the paradigm shift that the standards require to make effective curriculum and assessment decisions. The result is that language is assessed and taught through textbook driven, coverage laden, and activity based methods, with no anchor for knowledge and skills, and vocabulary is memorized in isolation (Eddy, 2005).

The 5 Cs in 3-D

The standards (National Standards, 2006) are presented as: *Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities*. In *Uncovering Content* the culture standard comes first through the *Enduring Understandings* and *Essential Questions*. Culture drives the curriculum, providing the focus for *Uncovering Content*. (Eddy, 2007) To identify the desired results, ask questions to examine a unit theme and develop a line of inquiry: What do you want the learner to remember about the culture? How does this culture respond to ideas on family life, leisure time, personal identity, or meal taking, and in this case, through a work of art? If this were a story from the culture, what would be the moral of that story (Eddy, 2006a)? This refocuses the line of inquiry from facts or products to cultural practices and perspectives.

The communication standard tends to be misunderstood as content, grammar, and vocabulary. Since in this model communication determines the mode of acceptable evidence and is the backbone of our assessment system, we treat it in stage 2 of backward design, when performance assessment built around works of art comes into play (Eddy, 2005). With *Uncovering Content*, culture and the arts from that culture are at the forefront of unit design. Lowenfeld (1952) stated that in order to understand a culture we need to look at its works of art and the different circumstances and factors—social,

cultural, and scientific—that led to the artist's intent when creating the work. Those connections hold the most compelling evidence in understanding the time period that fostered the culture as well as the culture itself. In this model,

Critical thinking skills are essential to widening the cultural lens, encouraging flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, willingness to change one's mind, and asking the *why, who, when, where, and how* of a culture. The learner hones these skills by connecting personally to the work of art and creating new interpretations of the art in performance tasks. The culture standard of products, practices, and perspectives informs the enduring understandings and essential questions by highlighting the non-negotiables of a unit theme. Find these themes when selecting a work of art. Why did the artist choose these colors, sounds, body movements, rhythm, light, or voice for this work? What do learners notice about these elements?

The culture standard drives the curriculum. To develop enduring understandings, we will ask what the target culture thinks, feels, says, or how it responds culturally to a unit theme or concept (Eddy, 2006b). By addressing the culture standard first and designing understandings and essential questions about that theme, three important things occur:

- The teacher focuses on **what is truly worth understanding**, e.g., the concepts, the “moral” of the story, allowing for careful decisions on what assessment will demonstrate that understanding. The enduring understandings and essential questions have tremendous implications for assessment and function like a curricular sieve. Teachers become more selective in terms of what knowledge and skills are required for that assessment, thus reducing the amount of unrelated material. The content and skills are there, but they have been carefully chosen to move the learner closer to understanding the core concepts, addressing the standard and realizing a performance goal (Eddy, 2006b).
- The learner assigns **purpose and coherence** to the knowledge and skills later needed for the assessment, rather than trying to recall skills in isolation.
- The learner automatically *engages the standards of Comparison, Communities, and Connections* which demonstrate the cultural interpretation of the unit theme. Underlying themes reveal cultural practices, products, and perspectives over time, allowing for comparisons of cultures and application of this interdisciplinary content to real life contexts. This further facilitates the assessment system because the best evidence of learner understanding will be with tasks that require learners to use their repertoire of knowledge and skills in situations they are likely to encounter in the target culture (Eddy, 2006b).

Works of art as culturally authentic material for performance assessment

As explained above, culturally authentic materials, texts,

audio, and visuals are the tools for meaningful student responses and should be used for designing performance assessments. For our purposes all works of art, visual and performing art, are culturally authentic materials if they have been made by and for the culture. Culturally authentic materials:

- Are essential components in creating the interpretive mode tasks
- Provide the learner with a tangible representation of the understanding and essential question
- Enable the learner to infer and create meaning

Two questions that guide the instructor are: *How will I use works of art as authentic content?* and *How do I create performance tasks that demonstrate transfer for our students?*

Choose works of art that examine a cultural practice or perspective, a response to a particular theme, or a big idea of your unit. A line of inquiry (Fuchs-Holzer & Noppe-Brandon, 2005) guides the instructor to develop curriculum and performance tasks around the work of art. The line of inquiry can examine a design element in the art such as space, people, colors, light, activity, rhythm, call and response musical patterns, and movement. Design activities before your students engage the work of art, so that they can connect to it personally while devising their own aesthetic choices in response to your questions. Have students experience the work of art several times before the performance assessments. Close with an oral or written reflection and questions that remain about the work of art that bring the instruction back to the understandings and essential questions. To summarize:

- Develop a line of inquiry that correlates to a theme within your unit.
- Create pre-viewing or pre-listening activities that will allow students to connect personal elements to the work of art.
- View the work of art.
- Assess for understanding with three modes of performance assessment.
- Have students reflect on the work of art (Davis & Eddy, 2006).

In this design model performance assessment shows evidence of transfer (Eddy, 2006b). Transfer is the use of knowledge and skills in new or unanticipated situations and contexts (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 2005). It requires inference, negotiation of meaning, and creation of new meaning; not just facts and completion of a drill. This kind of assessment will require learners to take stock of what they know and are able to do, and to use that repertoire appropriately in a given situation. This means that the learner understands that situations change and flexibility is essential.

What does true performance look like? Consider what happens anytime we communicate: Interactions are non-scripted, information is missing, ideas are not filtered, lan-

guage is not concise, and vocabulary is not adapted. People must sift through anything they hear or see to get precisely what they need to solve a problem or create something of value (Gardner, 1993). These are characteristics of tasks or assessments that simulate what it is like to be “in the game” or doing whatever the subject is in real life. It is not drill or mastery of facts. The knowledge of isolated pieces is not an indicator of real-world success or performing well in the game. Drills have their place, but the game is not the sum of the drills (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 2004). Without transfer tasks, the learner will not be able to develop the flexibility required when faced with unexpected situations in the target culture. Transfer is the hallmark of a well designed performance task in a language class (Eddy, 2006b).

The communication standard guides the assessment system and determines the assessment mode and the performance evidence. Therefore, it is treated in stage 2 of the framework: determine acceptable evidence (Eddy, 2007). The Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) prototype (Glisan, et. al., 2003) shifts from rote memorization and four skills in isolation to authentic performance, moving learners through the three modes via tasks that can connect to a common theme and the chosen work of art. The three modes of the communication standard are:

- **Interpretive:** students discover the appropriate cultural and/or linguistic meaning by listening, reading, and viewing culturally authentic materials. These can be text, advertisements, menus, and schedules; but also can be sculpture, song, theatre, dance, film, painting, or any art media made by and for the culture. Students make connections between existing knowledge and new information. These tasks are not synonymous with translation.
- **Interpersonal:** interactive communication between pairs or groups of students or native speakers that engages in active negotiation of meaning by listening, speaking, and writing in unrehearsed spontaneous exchanges, using information from the previous interpretive mode task that may have used a work of art as the culturally authentic material. This does not mean activities where students know in advance how they will respond, or oral interrogation of grammar forms.
- **Presentational:** communication involving a single student or groups of students to create and present a piece orally or in writing that has been refined, rehearsed, or planned with some anticipation, i.e., reports, essays, surveys, poems, dance, visual art, songs, journals, or plays that recreate the work of art or a theme embedded in the work of art. (Eddy, 2007)

Examining a work of art within a unit theme

Keeping with the theme of leisure, consider the following understandings and essential questions:

- *People spend leisure time in groups of all ages.*

- *Cultural traditions can play a role in how we spend our leisure time.*
- *What does a typical day off look like?*
- *How do we spend our leisure time?*
- *How do I see the people in my world? How do I see myself?*

Themes such as leisure, community, science, art, perception, colors, and emotions can be uncovered at different developmental stages with the same work of art. Consider the painting and the inspiration for the libretto quote at the beginning of the article, *Sunday afternoon on the island of La Grande Jatte* by Georges Seurat (Art Institute of Chicago, 1884-1886). It provides many lines of inquiry with different elements, people, action, practices, and perspectives that children will notice. The different age groups spending time together at the park is obvious. Older children can revisit this painting and notice different social classes spending leisure time at the same spot.

Consider pre-viewing activities that draw upon the students' background knowledge and their response to the essential questions and your line of inquiry. What small works of art, short play, or scene might they construct to prepare for viewing this work? After they experience the work, what performance tasks will take them deeper into the messages you want them to understand. For interpretive mode tasks, young learners can categorize colors, characters, actions, log their "noticings" on a graphic organizer, and circle and organize elements of the art with key vocabulary. With this information, they can compare the characters and their actions at the park with a partner, asking questions in the interpersonal mode. For presentational mode tasks, they can create a collage, change the genre of the work and create a short play inspired by the painting, or write a brief poem with the new vocabulary. Using works of art within the context of cultural practices and perspectives allows vocabulary and skills to connect with themes that recur in the student's language study.

The benefits of music in education are well known (Jensen, 2000). Culturally authentic songs and lyrics can be integrated into all levels of the curriculum. This art form need not only be used for appreciation of a particular musical genre or as a listening, cloze activity. Songs can be aligned to a theme, line of inquiry, concept, or social issue that appears in the curriculum. Performance assessment yields student products that draw upon their understanding of the lyrics and transfer interdisciplinary concepts, knowledge, and skills. These tasks ask students to solve a problem, reflect, or create a product (Gardner, 1993) from their understanding of the lyrics and the cultural messages they represent.

Music and lyrics help students learn about other cultures, their influence on musical genres, and the practices and perspectives of the cultures that influenced the artists and their

work. They apply what they learn about this music to better understand the communities that influence the blends of sounds and genres throughout the world. In this way, students expand their idea of music and understand various cultural communities through a much wider and inclusive lens (Eddy, 2006).

What do you want the students to "take away" from the song and remember about the message or the culture(s) that created the song? What would that understanding look like? What evidence do you want to see from your students that they understand the messages and ideas conveyed in the song? Now develop a few pre-listening activities—tasks where the students can predict or brainstorm from the theme. Next design the kinds of tasks that enable skills to transfer to application and understanding. In designing performance assessment, your song selection will be the culturally authentic material that guides the learner and provides the motivation for all subsequent tasks. The learner will react to the song, make inferences, list, organize, and listen for the main idea or key details (Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Using vocabulary from the lyrics, students use strategies such as circumlocution, finding cognates, and developing metaphor to work at the meaning of the lyrics and the message behind the music. Open-ended questions do not require students to recall facts in isolation, but to use critical thinking, planning, synthesis, and reflection to prepare a product, presentation, or performance.

The best presentational mode assessments are tasks that lead to a product or performance destined for a specific audience and a situation or opportunity that actually occurs in real life. For example, students write a mini screenplay using a song as the title track, or they complete a survey that deals with particular issues within the song. Maybe they diagram similarities and differences expressed in the song. Perhaps it is a brochure on cultural practices of a place represented in the song, or a short diamanté poem that retells the issue in the song, blending new and previously learned vocabulary (Eddy, 2006). The following list is a sample of performance tasks using music. When students hear music as a work of art connected to a theme or message in your unit, the vocabulary and skills will have purpose and cohere to recurring ideas in the curriculum. These are entirely adaptable and could be used with any song and many other culturally authentic materials.

- Ask questions about artist's intent.
- Write a spoof, parody, or skit based on a song.
- Propose solutions with a classmate on issues presented in a song.
- Change the genre and write a poem based on a song.
- Gather photographs that match situation, action, or themes and give them captions.
- Be a song or art critic.

- Create a story board.
 - Design a museum exhibit.
 - Change the ending to a song.
 - Write new verse.
 - Write a movie or theatrical plot based on a song, painting, or photograph.
 - Film an original music video for a song.
 - Select an object to match the meaning of a word, phrase, or entire song.
 - Conduct a survey or poll.
 - Create a list of main ideas and match them to phrases in a song.
 - Write a letter to the person in a song.
 - Compare a song track with another song you know with a similar theme.
 - Create an advertisement.
 - Persuade the person singing.
 - Draw a cartoon strip on the topic of a song.
 - Construct a game of the products, practices, and perspectives of the culture.
 - Listen to a song and put illustrations in order or number the pictures.
 - Record an on-air talk show.
- (Eddy, 2006)

Conclusion

The best advantage for learning through visual and performing arts is the ability to extend the learners' understanding of themselves and their world while guiding them to create meaning and extend their range of self-expression. By connecting to works of art, language and culture come alive to ignite inquiry and active learning. The arts define and transmit culture, dissolving barriers of religion, race, geography, and class. Works of art assert a reciprocal relationship between the learner and the painting, film, song, play, sculpture, or dance. This interaction yields new creations and performances shaped by the learner's interests, point of view, and social experience that shorten the creative distance between the artist and the child.

References

- Davis, J., & Eddy, J. (2006, October). *Discover cultural perspectives through art*. Presentation presented at the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers, Saratoga Springs, NY.
- Eddy, J. (2005, May). *Language assessment by Design: Understanding with the End in Mind*. Paper presented at the CUNY Council on Foreign Languages, New York.
- Eddy, J. (2006). *Sonidos, Sabores, y Palabras*. Boston: Thomson Heinle.
- Eddy, J. (Writer), & Couet, R. (Director). (2006a). What is performance assessment? [Television series episode]. In South Carolina Department of Education (Producer), *Teaching and Language Learning Collaborative*. Columbia, SC: ETV.
- Eddy, J. (Writer), & Couet, R. (Director). (2006b). How do I define assessment? [Television series episode]. In Office of Curriculum & Standards (Producers), *Teaching and Language Learning Collaborative*. Columbia, SC: ETV.
- Eddy, J. (2007). Uncovering Content, Designing for Performance. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 11(1).
- Fuchs-Holzer, M., & Noppe-Brandon, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Community in the making: Lincoln Center Institute, the Arts, and Teacher Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Galloway, V. (1998). Constructing cultural realities: "Facts" and frameworks of association. In J. Harper, M. Lively, & M. Williams (Eds.), *The coming of age of the profession* (pp. 129-140). Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
- Gardner, H. (1993). *Frames of Mind* (2nd ed.). New York: Basic Books. (Original work published 1983)
- Glisan, E. W., Adair-Hauck, B., Koda, K., Sandrock, S. P., & Swender, E. (2003). *ACTFL integrated performance assessment*. Yonkers, NY: ACTFL.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (2005). *Releasing the Imagination*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Grossman. (1991). Multicultural classroom management. *Contemporary Education*, 62(3), 161-166.
- Holzer, M. F. (2005). *Aesthetic Education Philosophy and Practice: Education Traditions*. New York: Lincoln Center Institute.
- Jensen, E. (2000). *Music with the Brain in Mind*. San Diego, CA: The Brain Store.
- Lowenfeld, V. (1952). *Creative and mental growth*. New York: Macmillan.
- Mc Tighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2004). *Understanding by Design Professional Development Workbook*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Mc Tighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2005). *Understanding by Design* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD. (Original work published 2001)
- National Standards in Foreign Language Education project. (2006). *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century*. Lawrence, KS: Allen Press. (Original work published 1999)
- Shrum, J. L., & Glisan, E. W. (2005). *Teachers Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction* (2nd ed.). Boston: ThomsonHeinle. (Original work published 1994)
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Dr. Jennifer Eddy is Assistant Professor of World Language Education in the Department of Secondary Education and Youth Services at Queens College of the City University of New York. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in methods, curriculum and assessment, and research, and also directs workshops and seminars for pre- and in-service teachers and college faculty. She has taught Spanish at all levels of instruction. Dr. Eddy designed and implemented