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*Being Japanese: Histories, Identities and Modernities*  
Incorporating Workshop Content

I am an Assistant Professor of English as Second Language (ESL) at Georgia Perimeter College, a two-year unit of the University System of Georgia. The capstone course for our ESL program integrates reading, writing, listening and speaking by using college level texts like Anthropology, Human Communication or History.

The course includes research projects, presentations, literary and film critique, online work, special projects, service learning, and other components found in college courses. I use an Anthropology text because it allows me to deal with a wide range of human issues and to integrate content from other academic disciplines.

In Spring 2010 I instituted a *sustained theme initiative* for the capstone course that incorporates a particular theme – *Japan* – into all aspects of the course for the duration of the semester. For each chapter in the Anthropology text, students apply the concepts they learn about Anthropology to Japanese culture.

The novel for the course was *Kitchen*, by Banana Yoshimoto, and the film was *Departures*, the 2009 Academy Award winner from Japan for Best Foreign Language film. Death was a theme in both of them, so students connected this with the discussion on death from the Anthropology chapter on belief systems.

We explored the Japan theme through reading, writing and discussion of contemporary and historical issues in Japan. After generating over seventy cultural topics, each student selected one to research further. They then presented their research through a poster project at a Japan Festival on campus.

I used the Japan theme again in Spring 2011, and will continue to refine and refresh it with new content, new novels and films, and new initiatives (web projects in lieu of poster projects, community activities, etc.). The following are curriculum projects I will incorporate based on content from the ASDP workshop (organized according to the four workshop sessions).

### **Collective Identity and Modernity**

As a professor of academic English (ESL), my main responsibility is to prepare students for college level studies, including the wide array of academic vocabulary and concepts needed to effectively function in American higher education. As Peter Nosco covered “A handful of history’s big categories”, such as *modern, early modern, post-modern, classical* and *medieval*, I realized that many of my advanced students who take college courses along with ESL are already encountering these concepts and terms – or will be soon. Since all students at my college take two history courses, and since I periodically integrate content from various disciplines into

my capstone course, I will integrate a lecture on *Historical Concepts and Terminology* with examples from Japan as well as western civilization for comparative purposes.

### **Identity in Early Modern and Modern Japan**

I have selected two books for use as reference for this content:

#### ***Early Modern Japan:***

Dunn, C. J., & Broderick, L. (2008). *Everyday life in traditional Japan*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing.

*”Everyday Life in Traditional Japan* paints a vivid portrait of Tokugawa Japan, a time when contact with the outside world was deliberately avoided and the daily life of the different classes consolidated the traditions that shaped modern Japan. Authentic samurai, farmers, craftsmen, merchants, courtiers, priests, entertainers and outcasts come to life in this magnificently illustrated portrait of a colorful society.” (www.tuttlepublishing.com)

#### **Curriculum Infusion**

This book will complement the threads on cultural transformation that run through the Anthropology text I use in the ESL capstone course (e.g. how traditions of the Edo period “shaped modern Japan”)

#### ***Modern Japan:***

Davies, R. J., & Ikenu, O. (Eds). (2002). *The Japanese mind: Understanding contemporary Japanese culture*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing.

“In *The Japanese Mind*, Roger Davies offers Westerners an invaluable key to the unique aspects of Japanese culture. Readers of this book will gain a clear understanding of what really makes the Japanese, and their society, tick.

Among the topics explored: aimai (ambiguity), amae (dependence upon others' benevolence), amakudari (the nation's descent from heaven), chinmoku (silence in communication), gambari (perseverance), giri (social obligation), haragei (literally, "belly art"; implicit, unspoken communication), kenkyo (the appearance of modesty), sempai-kohai (seniority), wabi-sabi (simplicity and elegance), and zoto (gift giving), as well as discussions of childrearing, personal space, and the roles of women in Japanese society. Includes discussion topics and questions after each chapter.” (www.tuttlepublishing.com)

### Curriculum Infusion

The topics in this book are naturally suited for both Anthropology content and my Japan theme. I have covered some of them in my sustained theme initiative, but this book will provide additional relevant and interesting topics. The discussion activities at the end of each chapter have two sections: 1) Exploring Japanese Culture; 2) Exploring Cross-Cultural Issues. Both will help students to think critically and discuss their opinions.

### **From Queen Himiko to Princess Mononoke, and All the Women in Between**

#### Curriculum Infusion

*The Japanese Mind* (above) includes discussions of women's issues, which I will connect to the Anthropology chapter on gender and sexuality in the Anthropology text. I am specifically interested in focusing on the challenges that college-educated women in Japan face regarding equality in the professional workforce sector. A number of Japanese female students in my courses over the years have expressed this frustration.

### **Forging Identity: Two Case Studies in the Representation of Modern Japan's Past**

#### Curriculum Infusion

I will connect this content with the chapter in the Anthropology text on art and forms of human expression. In the research / poster projects mentioned above in my course description, there are always several students who choose to focus on manga. Even many of those who do not choose manga for their projects are nonetheless interested in it. Therefore, I will include a lecture on manga and then assign an elective project where students create their own "mini-manga" (both narrative and artwork) on one of the following: 1) an interesting element of their home culture; 2) a personal experience; 3) a brief work of fiction.

In my capstone course, elective projects are those where students have a choice between two or more different projects that best connect with their interests and learning styles. Students who have little or no interest (or personal confidence) in projects that require drawing upon their own artistic abilities may choose an elective project other than the "mini-manga" assignment.