

Strategies for developing cultural/intercultural awareness: Postcards and Photographs

(Adapted from MLPSI, 2009)

Postcards and photographs can be included in the general 'culture box' relating to the target culture/s. They can be collected by students as well as by teachers in the school. Although tourist postcards can give an unbalanced 'pretty and touristy' view of a country or location, they often contain the images of the target country/ies with which the children are most familiar and as such are a good starting point. If the use of postcards is complemented by photographs the portrayal of the target country will potentially be more interesting. The advantage of using photographs is that you can select the aspects of the place and people that you wish to focus on and get behind the tourist 'façade'. Pictures and photographs are a powerful means of arousing interest in the target country/ies. Aspects of the CSPE curriculum relating to images and media can be explored through using postcards and photographs of the target country/ies.

Examining visual images relating to the target country/ies enables students to

- become familiar with aspects of the target country/ies
- question the content of the images
- explore bias and perspective
- explore attitudes and understanding
- explore similarities and differences between images of Ireland and the target country or between images of a number of different target countries
- explore stereotypes

General Guidelines for using images of the target country/ies:

- Use the target language if and when possible
- Don't over 'read' into the image for students. Allow them to 'read' the images for themselves
- Include images from a variety of countries where the target language is spoken, if relevant
- Encourage students to bring back postcards and photographs from holidays in the target country and integrate these in activities and classroom displays - consider giving them a list of things to be photographed on visits to the target country e.g. typical shopfronts, a market, a postbox etc. (more the 'ordinary' than the 'exotic')
- When using photographs of developing countries use guidelines such as those produced by Comhlámh in the 'Images of the Global South' publication:
http://comhlamh.org/assets/files/pdfs/Images%20Flyer%20-%20A4_web.pdf

Some questions to consider when teaching cultural awareness through the use of images: (adapted from *Watoto* resource - Trocaire)

- What am I hoping students will learn?
- What are my own images of the people/place?
- Where does this lesson/activity fit into the modern language curriculum and other curricular areas?
- Can I anticipate the students' reactions to the images?
- How can I teach about the place in a way that will enable students to identify with the people's experience?
- Am I mainly teaching about the place or the people?
- How comfortable would I feel if a teacher from the target country were a 'fly on the wall' in my classroom?
- Does the collection of images I use address ordinary life experience as opposed to only addressing 'exotic cultures'?

Techniques using postcards and photographs can include:

- Reading a postcard/photograph - see exemplars below
- Using pictures as a stimulus for discussion or to reflect on knowledge previously acquired e.g. Is this how you imagined the town would look? What do you notice about the houses that we have already spoken about? Is there anything in the picture that surprises you?
- Exploring perspective and bias e.g. Who do you think took the picture? Why was the picture taken?
- Using captions or speech bubbles with images - see exemplar below
- Classifying and ranking - see exemplars below

Some examples of activities:

**Reading postcards/photographs 1-
Postcards and country map-reading**

- Using the TARGET LANGUAGE introduce a number of postcards of famous cities in the target country to students
- Question them as to the location of the city e.g. What is this place called? Why is it famous? Why do people visit this place? Where is it located...in the North, South etc. Is it near...?
- Place the various postcards around a map of the target country with arrows to indicate where the cities are located
- Give additional information regarding the town/city as you place them e.g. It is near the coast, mountains, famous for...

Follow-up activity (in English/Irish)

- Divide the class into groups and give each group a postcard
- Ask each group to place the postcard in the middle of a chart and write as many questions as possible about the place around it - questions which have not already been answered

Some of the questions should relate to the particular image in the postcard and others should relate to more general information about the place and the people who live there

- Ask each group to read the questions that they have about the place
- Reflect on the questions asked:
What do you think are the most interesting questions asked?
What message did the photographers taking the pictures want to convey?
Is what is left out of the pictures important?
How can we find the answers to some of the questions?
Can all the questions posed be answered?

Reading postcards/photographs 2- Postcards and local map-reading

- Divide the class into groups and give each group a map of a city/town in the target country
- Show the class a number of postcards showing locations and landmarks of the city - give a description of the landmark, its location in the city etc. E.g It is a statue of... It is in ...Square...near the river...famous for...etc.
- Ask each group to find the location of one or two of the postcards on their map
- Ask each group to write a number of questions relating to the place that cannot be answered from the postcard
- Ask each group to share their questions with the class
- Reflect on the questions as in the activity above

Additional activity:

- Give out a number of photographs taken in the same place
- Compare the images:
Do we know more about the place by using both photographs and postcards?
Have you still got questions about the place that have not been answered?
How can we find the answers to such questions? (e.g. by asking our penpals, by asking someone who has lived in the place/visited the place, by doing research on the internet etc.)

Reading postcards/photographs 3 - Audit

- Divide the class into groups
- Give a postcard or photograph to each group of children
- Ask each group to look carefully at the image and answer a number of questions or complete an audit based on the image - The discussion in the group can be in English/Irish and the written worksheet in the target language)

Examples of questions: IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

- Weather: Hot/ Cold/Cloudy ?
- Landscape: Seaside /Mountains/Town ?
- Season: Summer /Winter/...?

- Place: Ireland/(Italy,...)?

**Example of audit:
IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE**

In the photograph there is:

- a man
- a woman
- a child

The building is

- a shop
- a house
- a supermarket

Ask each group to share their results with the class explaining how/why they gave certain answers where relevant.

For an example of an audit see the materials that accompanied CPD Module 2 in the relevant language section.

**Reading postcards/photographs 4 –
Using captions and speech bubbles**

- Divide the class into groups.
- Give each group a number of postcards or photographs and a number of captions and or speech bubbles written in the target language.
- Ask the children to match the postcards with captions or speech bubbles (if the images contain people).
- Ask each group to display their results giving the reasons how they decided on the particular match.

**Reading postcards/photographs 5 –
Here and there/My locality-your locality**

- Divide the class into groups.
- Give each group a postcard of the children's local area.
- Reflect on the image - what is the message being given about the area - Is the message an accurate one - is any aspect/ any location omitted from the postcards and why? - What is the purpose of the postcard?
- Give each group a postcard of a location in the target country.
- Reflect on the images using similar questions.
- Ask the children to write down two questions they cannot answer about the place from the postcard.

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Ranking

- Divide the class into groups
- Give each group 9 photos/postcards
- Ask each group to rank the pictures according to a criterion e.g. How much does the postcard/photograph tell us about the what the place looks like/ ordinary life in the city/the people who live there
- The pictures are organised in a diamond shape as described in the SPHE Teacher Guidelines where the formation is 1, 2, 3, 2, 1 with the most important at the top and the least important at the bottom
- Ask each group to present their arrangement of the pictures and explain their choices

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Classifying

- Divide the class into groups
- Give each group a number of photos/postcards - some taken in Ireland and some in the target country
- Ask the children to classify them into two groups according to which country they were taken in
- Ask each group to explain their classification
- For suitable photographs, see the materials that accompanied CPD Module 2 in the relevant language section

Video/DVD

If you have the opportunity to visit a target country, take video footage of the place and of the lives of the people who live there. Focus on giving the children a sense of the physical landscape, the built landscape, normal everyday activities and special events such as festivals. If you have a partner school in the target country, exchange video material on specific topics e.g. our school, the food that we eat, shops in our locality etc. The making of such videos can be integrated into the language programme.

When watching video pieces - whether homemade or commercial - focus the children's attention by asking them in advance to look out for particular things in the piece or to identify aspects that are similar to Ireland as well as different. It is a good idea to watch a piece of video initially with the sound muted in order to focus the children's attention more keenly on the visual aspect. Allow time for follow up discussion. Some examples of possible follow-up questions:

- Did you see anything that surprised you in the video?
- What things did you see that are similar to things that we have in Ireland?
- Do we have any festival/event in Ireland that is similar to this festival?
- Would you like to live in/go to school in...? Why?
- What do you like most about this place?
- What do you think it would be like to live there in Winter?

