

FROM THE CLASSROOM

The movie *Outsourced*: Classroom activities to promote intercultural fluency

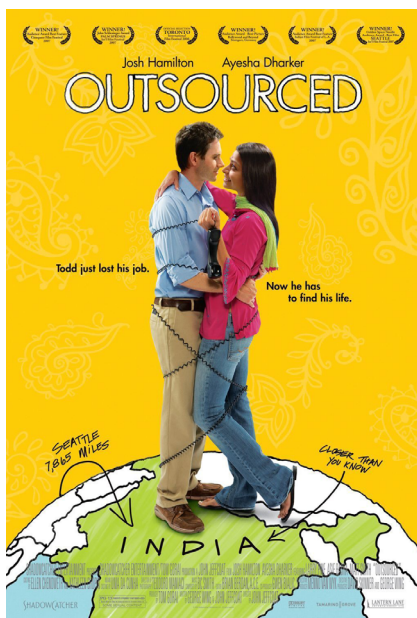
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Summary: This paper provides an overview of movie activities to promote intercultural fluency among English language learners. The movie *Outsourced* was shown in a South Korean intercultural communication class for English language learners. Students watched the movie and completed intercultural learning activities, including a cultural iceberg group project, listening activities, discussion questions, a cultural analysis paper, and a video assignment. This paper explains how to practically implement these activities in an English language classroom.

Keywords: intercultural communication, English language learners, *Outsourced*, movies for learning English

Although movies sometimes have a bad reputation for educational purposes, they can promote interest in studying English (Choi, 2013; Lee, 2017; Shieh, 2015). Research has also indicated the benefits of learning about intercultural communication through film (Roell, 2010). Through movie discussion and reflection activities, students can examine cultural experiences and explore how people from different cultures live (Cardon, 2010).

The movie *Outsourced* (Jeffcoat, 2006) is about an American man named Todd who goes to India because his company has been outsourced. While there, he faces many cultural conflicts as he experiences the initial stages of culture shock. As time progresses, Todd begins to truly appreciate his life in India and becomes less critical of the cultural differences as his cultural awareness improves and he adapts more.



Although the movie is slightly dated, it is still a valuable resource for teaching intercultural communication and provides students with insight into Indian culture.

The activities discussed in this paper center on the movie *Outsourced* and include a cultural iceberg group

project, listening activities, discussion questions, a cultural analysis paper, and a video assignment. The activities were implemented in an intercultural communication class at a university in South Korea during the spring semester of 2021. The instructor showed the movie for around 10–15 minutes in each class in the last half of the semester. While watching the movie, students completed listening activities as well as various other activities to connect the movie to intercultural communication themes being covered in class. The next section includes details about the classroom activities. Directions and suggestions are provided for clarification.

Cultural Iceberg

The cultural iceberg model helps students to brainstorm different forms of visible and non-visible culture. The instructor can share a cultural iceberg model with students and explain the two major types of culture, which include visible and non-visible elements. This sample iceberg model or another model found online could be given to students as a handout or displayed on a projector for the class to see. Some samples online provide specific examples of culture that are visible (e.g., holidays, festivals, foods) and non-visible (e.g., belief systems, family norms, collectivistic values).

The instructor provides students with a large piece of paper or a poster board and divides students into groups. The students draw a large iceberg on the paper.

As a group, students then write examples of visible and non-visible elements of culture that they remember from the movie. Students should be encouraged to include specific examples rather than general ones. Some examples might include discussing the Indian Holi celebration or providing

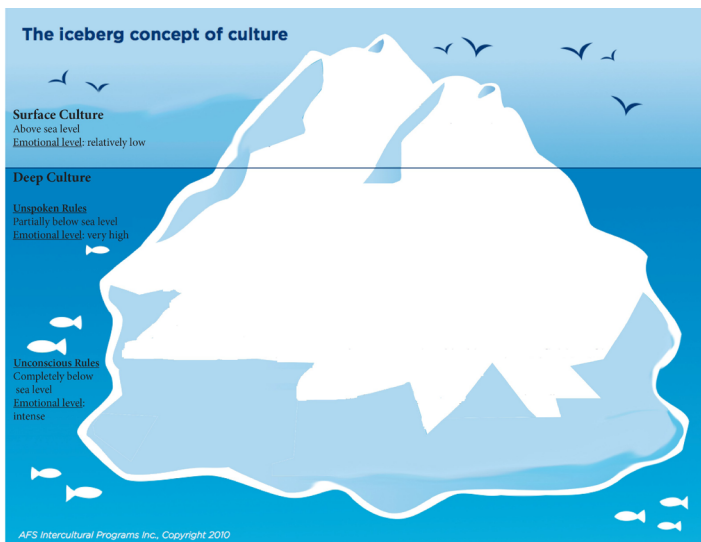


Figure 1: Sample Student Answers

specific examples of individualism and collectivism from the movie. When students are finished, the posters can be displayed in the classroom, or students can do an informal group presentation to share their examples.

Listening Activities

Students complete listening activities while watching the movie to ensure that they are focusing on the content and comprehending what is taking place. While students are watching the movie, they can be given a list of questions (there is [a free online source](#) that lists questions about this movie) to answer about the different scenes. Many of the questions involve intercultural themes. The questions are presented in sequential order, which makes it easy for the students to follow along. They begin when Todd first arrives in India and continue until the end of the movie. After watching a segment of the film, the instructor reviews the relevant questions at the end of the class. A sample student's answers are provided in Figure 1.

Another listening activity involves giving students a large piece of paper or having them write in their notebooks. The students divide the paper into five columns and include the following categories: language differences, high and low-context cultures, individualism and collectivism, ethnocentrism, and culture shock. For this assignment, language differences primarily centered on providing examples of how US and Indian English are used. The terms high and low-context cultures refer to the communication styles of particular cultures while individualism and collectivism relate to the degree of independence and interdependence valued by a culture (Neulip, 2020). Ethnocentrism pertains to the belief that one's culture is superior to

another (Neulip, 2020). Finally, culture shock involves the stages of adaptation in a new culture, with foreigners often experiencing a honeymoon period followed by a period of frustrations; eventually, newcomers adapt to the new environment (Neulip, 2020).

Other categories can be added including topics such as religion, dating norms, food, and parental roles. As students are watching the movie, they can write examples for each category on their paper. At the end of class, they can share their examples in a group, or if time is limited, individual students can be called on to share examples.

Discussion Questions

The next activity includes discussion questions that focus on intercultural themes in the movie and general questions pertaining to the movie. If classes are taught in a blended format, instructors can create an online discussion board to have students share their thoughts about the movie. Alternatively, these questions can be given as a worksheet for an in-class activity. Some sample questions include:

- What are your thoughts on the movie?
- What did you learn about intercultural communication through the movie?
- Who is your favorite character in the movie and why?

Outsourced Comprehension Questions



1. **As soon as Todd arrives, he experiences the discomfort of being disoriented in a strange new place. What happens at the airport?**

Many people were crowded inside the airport, and he didn't recognize anyone who came to greet him. And Todd thought he was a taxi driver, but he forced Todd into another small car.

2. **When a friendly traveler helps him get on the train, what does he tell him to do?**

He told Todd to get on the train.

3. **When he gets on the train, he cannot find an empty seat. How is this problem solved for him? How might this be a cultural solution?**

The boy conceded, and sat on his lap.

4. **As any exchange student, he has a lot of experiences trying new food. His first encounter is with an iced drink. What happens?**

He went straight to the bathroom because he had a stomach ache.

5. **First encounters with a culture can be shocking – Todd sees crowded streets with cows, noise, and a man urinating in the street. But how does his host describe the city?**

Figure 1: Sample Student Answers

- Is there anything that surprised you in the movie?
- What is ethnocentrism? Discuss an example of ethnocentrism in the movie. What are some examples in history or in present society?
- Give some examples of culture shock from the movie. How might an international student feel coming to your school or university?
- What is collectivism? What is individualism? What are some examples from the movie? Do you consider your culture to be more collectivistic or individualistic?
- What is a high-context culture? What is a low-context culture? What are some examples from the movie?
- What are some examples of language differences in the movie?

Have students create some of their own questions to ask classmates about the movie. The questions can pertain to intercultural themes.

Cultural Analysis Paper

Students analyze one aspect of culture in the movie and present it in a cultural analysis paper. The assignment can be approximately 1–2 pages. Have students pick a particular aspect of culture or intercultural communication in the movie to explore further. The paper can be on the major intercultural themes discussed in class. The paper can also explore other topics such as parental roles, religion, dating norms, and holidays. Students can discuss these themes in relation to the movie and use scholarly sources to further explore them in more depth. The students can also analyze how their specific aspect of culture was presented in the movie, whether it seems to have been accurately portrayed, and what they learned about it.

Video Assignment

Students create a video as a culminating activity to share what they learned from the movie. As a group, students complete a video assignment about one aspect of culture (e.g., collectivism, high-context cultures, ethnocentrism) or intercultural communication presented in the movie. The video should begin with an introduction to the aspect of culture. The group should use scholarly sources to specifically explain the cultural aspect from the movie. Students provide examples of the aspect of culture in the movie. Finally, students reflect on what they learned. Instructors can assign one topic to each group to have more variation in topics.

Alternatively, the instructor can create a list of questions that students address pertaining to the movie and use it as a reflection assignment. Videos should be about 5–10 minutes and shared during class or as a homework activity.

Reflection and Conclusion

This assignment provides a fun and meaningful way for students to learn more about intercultural communication through activities pertaining to themes dramatized in the movie. Through these activities, students can more fully reflect on authentic intercultural experiences that arise from differences in language, values, and cultural styles of communication. Students who took this class reported that the activities were a meaningful, fun, and memorable way to enhance their understanding of intercultural communication.

Several other movies could replace *Outsourced* (2006), such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), a more recent and relevant movie, to demonstrate the Westernization of immigrants and the way these changes can impact traditional cultures. Also, Disney has created many intercultural movies that reach younger audiences; a few examples include *Brave* (2012), *Coco* (2017), and *Encanto* (2021). These movies can be fun and entertaining while providing viewers an opportunity to learn about other cultures. Furthermore, developing class activities that center on intercultural communication themes in the movies can reinforce cultural concepts discussed in class. It is important to note though that movies may not always accurately reflect cultural norms, which viewers need to be cognizant of.

Although this is a practical article, it may be beneficial to conduct empirical research in the future that examines the benefits of learning about intercultural communication through movies and other engaging activities. There are some modifications that could be made based on instructor observations and student feedback. Instead of showing the movie for a short duration over many class periods, it may be better if it is assigned during two class periods to allow students to spend more time working on the activities. It may also be beneficial to have students research the cultural accuracy of the movie. In addition, if the instructor does not want to spend class time on a movie, students could select a movie pertaining to intercultural communication or cultural diversity as a homework assignment and complete a paper or video assignment related to intercultural themes in the movie.

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