

Race: Material Adaptation and Evaluation

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Part I: Context

The textbook I selected for this project is “Power On Communication English I ,” which was published by a major Japanese publishing company called Tokyo Shoseki. It is one of the government-authorized textbooks that I used to teach the 10th graders in Tokyo Metropolitan High School two years ago. My target population is low-intermediate high school English learners in Japan aiming to matriculate into a four-year university after graduation. The textbook is designed for those 10th grade low-intermediate English learners in one of the mandatory English classes entitled “Communication English I .” For this adaptation, I chose a unit related to race, the title of which is “The Power to Unite People.” The unit goal is to learn about the history of apartheid in South Africa and how Nelson Mandela tried to unite the country. The students are supposed to be somewhat familiar with the topic about apartheid, because they are taking a world history class in the same year.

Part II: Evaluation of the Material

2.0. Description of the Unit

The unit consists of four parts. Each part has a short reading passage, vocabulary list, and brief reading comprehension questions. Each reading passage includes one sentence that uses a target grammar structure. More specifically, Part 1 introduces apartheid and Nelson Mandela, focusing on the target grammar past perfect. Part 2 describes the situations in the 1995 Rugby World Cup in South Africa, focusing on the target grammar future progressive. Part 3 explains how the South African national team, the Springboks, fought against the opposing team in the World Cup, focusing on the target grammar participial constructions. Part 4 describes the moment when the Springboks won the game and ends with Mandela’s comment about sport

having the power to unite people. The target grammar in Part 4 is also participial constructions. After all the reading parts, the target grammar structures are explained, followed by grammar exercises. The last two pages of the unit include a review of the reading passages in True/False questions, a fill-in-the-blank exercise of the summary, pronunciation exercises, a dialogue completion, and a reflection about the readings.

2.1. Evaluating the material from the teacher's perspective

From my perspective as a teacher, the author is biased in favor of Nelson Mandela throughout the unit. Part 1 superficially introduces apartheid and does not mention any important information, such as how the system started and abolished, how black people were treated unequally on a daily basis, how Nelson Mandela spent time in prison, and how Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa. Also, Part 2-4 mention how Nelson Mandela contributed to the victory of the Springboks in the 1995 Rugby World Cup and united the black people and white people by wearing the team cap and jersey at the stadium. However, the readings do not mention the long and complicated process of people's struggles until they achieved the historic victory. In my opinion, the paths toward racial equality should not be so easy and simple as it is written in the readings.

Overall, the readings neglect the dark history of apartheid, such as black people's experiences of suffering from the pain by racial discrimination. The author emphasizes the positive story of people eventually overcoming the racial barriers and uniting the country, as if all the problems had been solved since then. According to DiAngelo (2018), racism is different from mere prejudice or discrimination and not limited to a single discriminatory act or person. Rather, racism happens at a societal and institutional level systematically, such as in the laws, policies, and practices. Although many white people consider racism as something that happened

in the past, it still exists between white people and people of color in every institution across society (DiAngelo, 2018). Therefore, I think that it is important to treat this topic as an ongoing thing to the present days rather than a thing of the past. The author seems to lack this perspective because he puts emphasis on the historic victory of the Springboks and only tells the successful story of the past, not mentioning the current situation of South Africa.

2.2 Evaluating the material from students' perspectives

The topic about apartheid and Nelson Mandela is appropriate for high school students who need to gain general world knowledge for university entrance exams. They should have some basic background knowledge about the topic, considering the fact that they are taking a world history class. However, the reading passages do not provide detailed information about apartheid or Nelson Mandela because of the word limitations adjusted to the level of low-intermediate learners. Since no concrete examples of apartheid are provided in the reading passages, students might not understand how serious the issue was when apartheid was implemented.

Moreover, all the questions at the end of each reading passage are superficial reading comprehension questions that do not require much higher-order thinking. Students could just find the exact wording of the questions in the passage and copy the sentences for the answers without actually understanding the texts. In addition, the summary exercise and the reflection activity fail to perform their functions, because they are made into fill-in-the-blank exercises where students just need to supply the texts with words given in the passage or in the word bank. For all these reasons, the students tend to focus more on memorizing the vocabulary and grammar points rather than thinking critically about the readings.

Furthermore, the topic is not presented in a way that makes direct relevance to the students' lives. For instance, there is no such exercise to have them think about the problems of racial discrimination in Japan. Although racism is a universal problem that can happen anywhere in the world, the students might not be able to relate to the readings, if they feel that apartheid was a historical event that happened in the past in a foreign country far away from Japan.

2.3. Evaluating the materials in terms of praxis

As previously mentioned in the section 2.1., the textbook unit only describes how great Nelson Mandela was and how sport can work as a powerful tool to unite the people together. It gives the readers an impression that all the problems including racial discrimination have been solved peacefully. The voices of the black people who suffered from apartheid are completely missing. Also, Nelson Mandela's struggles when he was in prison are not mentioned at all.

The last reflection activity of the unit is especially biased because it only gives the word bank of expressions in favor of Nelson Mandela's words, when it asks for students' opinions about what Nelson Mandela said. There is no room for students to think critically about the readings and express their true opinions. For example, some students might question the power of sport to change the world and disagree with what Nelson Mandela said, but the way the activity is designed does not allow them to do so. This stereotypical stance presented by the author perpetuates the notion that there is only one correct answer for expressing opinions, which makes students seek for an ideal answer expected by the teacher.

Overall, the weaknesses of this unit far outweigh its strengths, so that is why the unit needs to be adapted in many ways. Although the unit uses many photos and pictures to support the readings for low-level learners, which can be considered as one of the few strengths, these

visual aids are not utilized effectively. The adaptations will be mainly made by adding some more visual materials like photos and videos to highlight the negative aspect of the dark history. Moreover, the reflection activity will be replaced by a new discussion task, in which students express their opinions freely in groups by answering the discussion questions about the current situation in South Africa (comparing past and present) and the current situation in Japan (making relevance to their lives).

Part III: Adaptation Explained

I mainly adapted the first two pages of the unit (Part 1) and also the last page (the reflection activity). These adaptations are intended to compensate for the weaknesses I described in Part II: Evaluation of the material. In addition to the original textbook unit goal to “learn about the history of apartheid in South Africa and how Nelson Mandela tried to unite the country,” I developed the following social justice objectives:

- **Identify the ways** apartheid separated the black people from the white people (specific examples of apartheid) by describing and analyzing more photos of discriminatory signs that were used under apartheid
- **Explore** the negative aspect of Nelson Mandela’s experiences, especially his life in prison (how black prisoners were treated differently from white prisoners), by watching different short video clips describing the situations in the past from various perspectives (Mandela, another former prisoner, a traveler’s blog, etc.)
- **Examine Nelson Mandela’s beliefs in peace-building by finding his quotes and interpreting his ideas behind the quotes**

- **Discuss** the current situation in South Africa (Black people are still underrepresented, e.g., lack of black players in the team) by expressing their opinions on the given statements
- Relate the racial discrimination issues in South Africa to the situation in Japan by looking at the discriminatory signs **against foreigners and discriminatory comments against half-Japanese famous figures (e.g., Naomi Osaka, Ariana Miyamoto)** in Japan

With these objectives in mind, I added three activities on the first two pages of the unit (Part 1) and replaced the reflection activity on the last page with a new discussion activity. For all the additional activities, I tried incorporating authentic materials by using pictures, videos, and quotes. According to Morrow (1977), an authentic text is “a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort” (p. 13). Since authentic materials increase learners’ confidence in using the target language when they encounter real life situations (Harmer, 1994), I believe it is beneficial to incorporate such materials as the real signs used in the past and Mandela’s quotes.

The first activity I created involves additional photos of discriminatory signs used under apartheid. Although the unit originally has a photo of one discriminatory sign that says, “Whites only,” it does not have any activity or question related to the sign and lacks information about what it was for and where it was used. Therefore, I decided to present more photos of discriminatory signs used in the public facilities, such as subways, bathrooms, and beaches, in order to have my students think about how black people were separated from white people on a daily basis. **Just to show them how the quality of the facilities was different for white people and black people, I also put a photo of the different water fountains in the US in 1950s. It can also be a good opportunity for the students to learn briefly about the racial discrimination in the US. According to United Nations (2019), human rights are defined as “rights inherent to all human**

beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status,” including “the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more” (para. 1). In the activity, the students are asked to describe the photos and answer the discussion questions related to the original reading passage, “What are fundamental human rights?” “What do we mean by human rights?” “What are the fundamental human rights black people were denied?”

The second activity I developed looks at Nelson Mandela’s negative experiences in prison. The original text has one sentence that says, “He had been in prison for twenty-seven long years because he fought against this awful system.” However, it does not include any more information about the life in prison. Therefore, I decided to put three QR codes to different short video clips to show the reality of prison life from diverse perspectives. In the first video, Nelson Mandela is interviewed in his prison cell when he was back there, and describes his experience and change in his viewpoints after spending such a long time in the prison. In the second video, Eddie Daniels, an anti-apartheid activist who was imprisoned with Nelson Mandela from 1964 to 1979, is interviewed in Mandela’s cell and describes the life conditions in the past by sharing his experiences there. In the third video, a travel blogger films a tour guide demonstrating what a prison life was like on Robben Island. The guide explains the severe life conditions of prisoners in details, describing how they were brought to the island in chains, how the types of provided food and clothing were different depending on the racial classification, and how they were only allowed to sleep on one side on straw mats on the floors. After watching all these three videos, the students are asked to answer the questions, “What did the prisoners’ life look like?” “How were black prisoners treated differently from white prisoners?” “What do you think a life in prison for 27 years would look like?”

The third activity, which is assigned as homework, involves looking into Mandela's quotes. The original text says, "Even so, he thought black people should not take revenge on white people." but it does not tell why he thought so. To understand Mandela's belief behind why he thought so, I believe it is effective to incorporate his direct quotes and examine what he actually said, rather than an expression paraphrased by the author. The three quotes I chose as examples (in the PowerPoint slides) convey the importance of love and forgiveness for others. These examples are some of the expected quotes that could be chosen by the students. In this homework, the students are asked to look for Mandela's quotes that show his beliefs in peace building and think about the messages he wanted to convey through his quotes. Then, they are asked to answer the discussion question, "Why did Mandela think black people should not take revenge on white people?"

To summarize, these three activities in Part 1 are supplementary materials to the existing reading passages, pictures, and reading comprehension questions. Each of the activity addresses the social justice objectives mentioned above in this order. The reading comprehension questions at the end of Part 1 are kept as they are, but the discussion questions for each of the new activities intend to generate more meaningful discussions and promote in-depth understanding about the topic.

The final adaptation I made was the discussion questions that will replace the reflection activity on the last page of the unit. The original text has a reflection activity where the students are supposed to write an opinion on what they thought about Mandela's words, but it was actually a mere fill-in-the-blank exercise. Therefore, I decided to replace it with a set of discussion questions that ask for their opinions on three different statements. The students are

first asked to have an oral discussion about all three statements in groups, and then asked to write a short paragraph about one statement of their choice (about five sentences long).

The first statement says, “Sport has the power to change the world,” which is essentially the same question the original reflection activity was trying to ask, but in this new activity, the students will have much more freedom in terms of the structure of the sentences and vocabulary they can use. The second and the third statements say, “There is no discrimination against black people in South Africa today.” “Racial discrimination exists in Japan.” The students will first try to answer these questions and exchange opinions in groups based on what they already know. After that, I will show them some evidence of pictures or a video clip to either support or oppose the statements. For example, I will present a picture of the Springboks players in the 2019 Rugby World Cup held in Japan and have the students discuss the racial composition of the team. The picture indicates that black people are still underrepresented, because there are more white players than black players. Another example is the pictures of racial discriminatory signs in Japan. One sign is taken at a restaurant, whereas the other is taken at a hot spring facility. I will show these pictures and have the students discuss what kind of discrimination it is, who the sign is for, why the owner does it, and so on. Moreover, I will introduce Naomi Osaka (half-Japanese professional tennis player) and Ariana Miyamoto (half-Japanese Miss Universe Japan 2015), and show them a short video clip of Ariana Miyamoto talking about racial discrimination against her in Japan. The students are allowed to change their opinions in the short paragraph after having the group discussions and receiving the teacher’s input like the pictures and the video clip. This reflection activity aims to achieve the last two social justice objectives mentioned above by having the students express their opinions freely.

In conclusion, I made all these four major adaptations in order to strengthen the existing materials and bring social justice perspectives to the unit. More specifically, I added the photos of discriminatory signs under apartheid, the QR codes to access to the video clips about prisoners' life on Robben Island, homework involving Nelson Mandela's quotes, and various discussion questions to enhance the students' critical thinking skills. I attempted to incorporate as many authentic materials as possible and include three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. Therefore, in the adapted activities, the students are asked to look at the signs, watch the video clips, find the quotes, and interpret the materials first. Then, they are asked to discuss the questions related to the materials and orally interact with each other in pairs or groups. Finally, they are asked to present their opinions on one of the statements in the short paragraph. I believe that these adapted materials address the problems of racism and demonstrate more inclusive and democratic views of the world.

Part IV: The Adapted Materials

See PowerPoint slides for the details.

Adapted Activity #1: Photos of discriminatory signs under apartheid & Discussion questions

Adapted Activity #2: QR codes to the video clips about Robben Island & Discussion questions

Adapted Activity #3: Homework to find Nelson Mandela's quotes & Discussion questions

Adapted Activity #4: Opinion short paragraph (Discussion Questions)

References

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