

Research Article

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Adapting Open-space Learning Techniques to Teach Cultural Literacy

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Abstract: There is a growing body of work on the theory of cultural literacy, but little has been written on how to teach cultural literacy in higher education contexts. This article discusses the use of Open-space Learning (OSL) techniques as valuable tools for teaching cultural literacy. Cultural literacy and OSL are two different areas of study, but there is common ground between them, and cultural literacy can draw great benefit from the cross-pollination of ideas with OSL. The paper focuses on practice-based models used in OSL that have been adapted to teach cultural literacy. The aim of these practice-based models is to create an environment that teaches students how to transfer the analytical and critical skills that they learn as part of a literary and cultural studies (LCS) course to real-life scenarios. We argue that an important part of this learning environment is what we refer to as cognitive “destabilisation,” and discuss why OSL techniques are ideally suited to fostering such destabilisation in students.

Keywords: cultural literacy, open-space learning, destabilisation, higher education, cultural competence

Introduction

Increasingly, students and professionals around the world engage in interdisciplinary and multicultural collaborations. In fact, for many of us, this is already a given. Today, it is imperative for higher-education institutions (HEIs) to provide their students with the skills that will give them the flexibility and mobility to operate efficiently in these varied, ever-shifting contexts. Cultural literacy (CL) gives students this flexibility, equipping them with the ability to read and interpret unfamiliar cultural artefacts, so that they may adapt and engage with them in a more efficient manner. Our contention is that proficiency in CL allows graduates to transcend both disciplinary and cultural boundaries, increasing understanding, openness, respect and responsibility for self and others.

In order to equip students with the skills associated with cultural literacy, it is important to create the right conditions for this in the teaching space. A crucial aspect of cultural literacy is skill transferability. The same skills that are used in the analysis and interpretation of literary works or other cultural artefacts can be applied to real-life situations. In the case of situations that students are new to, or unfamiliar with, these skills can be very helpful in terms of interpretation; they can allow students to draw meaning from things and experiences that are unsettling or unknown. For this purpose, it is essential to create teaching spaces where students can be exposed as far as possible to the type of unfamiliarity and uncertainty that they will experience in real-world situations or at least a curated semblance of such unfamiliarity and uncertainty. This approach to teaching is defined by García Ochoa, Monk and McDonald as “destabilisation” (550), and

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it must always be followed by a well-structured period of reflection, where students learn to understand the confusion or ambiguity that arises from the destabilising experience.

This paper is based on a number of examples of activities that took place during a Higher Education workshop, as part of the second Biennial Cultural Literacy in Europe Conference (Warsaw, 2017). It explains how Open-space Learning (OSL), with its methods for shaping learning spaces, can be adapted to destabilise students in order to teach them skills associated with cultural literacy. In OSL, the fundamental ethos that directs the interaction in the teaching space closely aligns with cultural literacy. OSL is predicated on the understanding that “learning should be grounded in discovery, enquiry and action, with stress on the development of social intelligence” (Monk). OSL and its practice-led methodologies focus on an embodied model of learning that disrupts the traditional positioning found in the teaching and learning space. Monk *et al.* define such spaces as

transgressive (where barriers between students and teachers are suspended, and the idea of failure is honoured), transitional (as learning exists between defined spaces), transcendent (moving beyond traditional learning styles), transrational (requiring both intuitive, physical responses as well as rational information processing), and transactional (where ideas are exchanged freely and openly). (1-9)

The fundamental shift in position required of the individual in OSL aligns closely with the idea of destabilisation and can be used as a point of departure for the teaching and acquisition of skills associated with cultural literacy, opening the potential for a rich partnership between these areas.

Cultural Literacy in the Context of Higher Education

The term “cultural literacy” was first coined by E. D. Hirsch in the 1980s, when he published two articles, “Culture and Literacy” (1980), and “Cultural Literacy” (1983), followed by the book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). Our approach to cultural literacy here is markedly different from Hirsch’s. It follows that proposed by a group of literary and cultural studies (LCS) scholars in 2007, who worked as part of a Europe-based project on outlining the contributions that LCS could make to the grand challenges that humanity faces today (Segal *et al.* 5). These scholars define cultural literacy as an interdisciplinary, multicultural approach that denotes “a way of looking at social and cultural issues—especially issues of change and mobility...through the lens of literary thinking” (Segal 7).

Given its starting point in literary studies, cultural literacy approaches cultures and cultural artefacts as “text-like,” readable “objects” (Segal *et al.* 4). Any manifestation of culture—food, clothing, social practices, etiquette, literature, history, to mention some examples—can be considered a cultural artefact. Within the fields of LCS, these cultural artefacts are seen as “texts,” in the sense that they are “readable.” They are produced, and used, to interpret the world, following different semiotic codes, which also links our approach to cultural literacy to Halliday’s ideas on social semiotics (1978). When students understand and learn to apply skills and concepts from LCS to real-life scenarios and to enact this cultural readability, they start to develop their cultural literacy. A culturally literate person is able to view culture as a readable, subjective construct that can be interpreted and modified. In this sense, cultural literacy denotes “the ability to read and interpret culture in its many manifestations (cultural artefacts) by applying skills and knowledge inherent to literary and cultural studies (LCS), opening up the possibility to modify such artefacts, or one’s attitude toward them” (García Ochoa, McDonald & Monk 547). It should be noted that the definition of “culture” adopted in this approach is quite encompassing: it refers not only to specific customs that may be related to a person’s ethno-geographic background but also to academic disciplines and the practices associated with them.

When we train students and professionals to be culturally literate, we are, in essence, teaching them how to engage with what is different, unfamiliar or unknown. We are equipping them with the necessary skills to “read” and “interpret” new situations so that they can adjust to them with efficiency. In so doing, one of our aims is to instil openness, awareness and reflexivity as habits of inquiry, which our students will apply to themselves first and foremost, and then to the world that surrounds them.

Discussing the traditional definition of literacy, Bill Green argues that literate individuals know that they do not need to know everything in order to reach their goals. Rather, a premise of literacy is that one learns how to navigate situations outside his/her “immediate competence,” and understands “what to do and who to see” in order to achieve one’s purpose (160-161). This is similar to Ly Tran’s definition of “creative or agentive ignorance” (2015). According to Tran, agentive ignorance denotes both an awareness of one’s own lack of knowledge, and the willingness to address this in order to build new competencies. Passive ignorance is the opposite, a lack of awareness of one’s own lacunae in knowledge, and a failure to show interest in addressing the possibility of ignorance (Tran, “Internationalising the Student Experience”). Through the constant questioning that presupposes this attitude of agentive ignorance and the drive to find logical answers, students can develop a true sense of informed empathy towards ways of being or cultural scenarios that may be fundamentally different to what they consider normal. It is important for students to understand that there will be countless situations in their personal and professional lives where their knowledge will not be absolute. Rather than aiming to achieve that impossible state of “absolute knowledge or expertise,” a much more efficient approach is to develop skills that will allow them to read and analyse these situations in order to draw meaning from them. In this way, they will be able to become versatile professionals who can adapt to different cultural and disciplinary contexts. Our contention is that once students become culturally literate individuals, they will be able to have a better understanding of diversity. They will be able to communicate their ideas in ways that are appropriate to their context. In this sense, cultural literacy goes hand in hand with openness, adaptability and tolerance. It denotes a willingness to engage with difference, an understanding that ways of being and doing things that may be fundamentally different to one’s own are valid and deserve courtesy and respect.

Destabilisation

According to García Ochoa, McDonald and Monk, destabilisation is a key element in the process of teaching cultural literacy. We define it as a teaching strategy designed to prompt “both a conceptual shift in students and a more instinctive, “visceral” form of unrest” (550) that may unsettle their views on a given topic. This conceptual shift and visceral unrest allow students to understand how they approach, both theoretically and empirically, what they do not know, so that they may become aware of how they react to uncertainty and the instability of new situations. Thus, destabilisation is “a “liminal stage in the learning process...when students have already encountered the unknown without fully assimilating the implications of the learning experience, and as a consequence, find themselves in an ambiguous state, with certain unresolved tensions regarding their views of the discipline and what these imply” (550). One of the aims of destabilisation is to create a space where students feel safe to question themselves. Unless they are able to start this process of introspection, it is unlikely that they will be able to apply a similar type of objective questioning to their ever-shifting personal and professional contexts.

When students are being destabilised as part of the learning experience, they come face to face with their lack of knowledge in relation to a given topic, idea, or disciplinary area. Schwartzman argues in this regard that “real learning requires stepping into the unknown, which initiates a rupture in knowing” (38). This liminal, ambiguous stage of learning, between being exposed to a new idea and understanding it, can be unsettling and challenging for students. Depending on how it is handled by the educator, it can be either empowering or inhibiting. This is why it is vitally important to follow the destabilisation process with a well-structured period of reflection, where students apply the skills that they have learnt as part of an LCS course to understand the confusion or ambiguity that arises from the destabilising experience. According to García Ochoa, McDonald and Monk, this is how truly transformative learning takes place. Through critical reflection, students are able to exercise the necessary skills to draw meaning from challenging cultural artefacts. By reflecting on their experiences of destabilisation, they start to “build” cognitive structures that will help them interpret the unknown. Schwartzman argues that “as the mechanism for transformational learning, reflectiveness is required for productively navigating the interval of confusion that follows an encounter with the existentially unfamiliar” (40). It is the process by which we “become critically aware

of our own presuppositions” and, as a consequence, are able to challenge “our established and habitual patterns of expectation” (Meizrow 12). As outlined above, this is the main purpose of destabilisation, to instigate both a conceptual and a visceral shift in students as part of the learning experience, but only after instilling the necessary tools to help them understand that experience constructively. In this way, LCS skills are applied as a “cognitive scaffolding” that helps students to make sense of a seemingly chaotic situation. It is also important to make a note of the facilitator’s duty of care in relation to the destabilisation experience. Students from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds will experience destabilisation differently. Therefore, it is vitally important that facilitators take this into consideration when engaging their students in destabilising activities. To the extent that it is possible, these activities need to be adjusted to the context of diversity present in the learning environment. Otherwise, the process of destabilisation can have unintended, negative outcomes.

Using OSL Techniques to Destabilise Students

What is now known as OSL developed at the University of Warwick’s CAPITAL Centre in 2005, thanks to a grant from the Higher Education Funding Council of England and the Royal Shakespeare Company. OSL has to do with “space and performance, and their effects upon teaching and learning” (Monk *et al.* 1). The original aim of the CAPITAL Centre was to improve the quality of learning and teaching through “active performance.” This involved a double-pronged pedagogical approach, training students in theatre performance skills and creative thinking and, at the same time, teaching them how to transfer these skills to their learning in other subjects. The aim was that students could learn both more about their academic discipline and also an organic understanding of how to integrate this into their world outside academia. This approach emphasised “active performance” in teaching and learning, offering “a shared space—both physical and conceptual—for teachers, students and practitioners...to come together and inform each other’s work, linking theory with practice” (Bate and Brock 343). As such, OSL is an intrinsically “transdisciplinary” way of teaching in higher education that seeks to create “conditions in which learning is immediate, enactive, and alive” (Monk *et al.* 1).

The theoretical framework of OSL is also transdisciplinary in nature. It is a combination of theories in pedagogy, performance, neuroscience, and social theory. In Monk *et al.*’s words,

OSL is informed by [...] methods such as “enactive” learning, “kinaesthetic” learning, and the various methods of teaching developed by practitioners such as Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, and related to the work of thinkers like Lev Vygotsky, Howard Gardner, and David A. Kolb. It also has affinities with “applied drama,” “applied theatre,” or “applied performance.” In addition, theories around OSL are influenced by the work in neuroscience of academics like Andy Clark and Antonio Damasio, who seek to reconnect mind, body and work. Beyond this, we have incorporated social theory and the ideas connected to a “third space,” in which teaching and learning are conducted in ways, and in spaces, that bring together knowledges and skills from students, subject experts and practitioners in the creation of understanding. (2)

The workshop model constitutes the basis of OSL. It is defined as a “teaching and learning session that takes place in an environment in which participants can engage actively with the learning materials that are the session’s focus,” thus allowing each student to “become the producer and discoverer of knowledge” (1-2). OSL focuses on creating a secure environment for learning that is not a comfort zone, and it is here that its overlap with our idea of destabilisation can be found.

Destabilisation is a core element of OSL. In the first instance, most students find the embodied nature of OSL challenging. It is a strongly destabilising element of this teaching approach. It places students in a vulnerable position, which many may at first feel uncomfortable with, first and foremost because this approach tends to be unfamiliar to them. But when the process is properly facilitated, it can lead to a new approach to learning that allows students to experiment and take risks, explore their creativity and the limits of their learning potential. Students who have been involved in OSL report “a greater willingness to take personal responsibility and an increased openness to experiment and risk” (1). In this regard, Monk *et al.* argue that

The open spaces draw participants into an acknowledgement of their embodied nature, which can lead to complete engagement with it, and that has the effect first of radically unsettling them (reactions of discomfort to the sheer vulnerability they feel through intense self-exposure), but then of liberating them. Working collaboratively, sharing ideas, moving around and through open space (doing their thinking not just intellectually but physically), they see themselves trying things out, rehearsing possibilities, freed to be provisional, to take risks, to offer and own ideas, but also to make mistakes and to change their minds. (3)

The following is a description of a collection of OSL activities that involve embodied learning, two of these (#1 and #4), were used during a Higher Education workshop, as part of the second Biennial Cultural Literacy in Europe Conference (Warsaw, 2017). Given the embodied-learning nature of these activities, they all serve as good examples of destabilisation in the teaching space. As a collection, they constitute a single imaginary workshop (although some of the materials have been used in practice, and versions of the activities have been facilitated on many separate occasions).

The workshop is divided into four categories: warm-up; introductory activity; long activity; assessed activity. This imaginary session is an introduction to the city of Brighton, in the county of Sussex in the UK. Brighton is a seaside town with a culturally diverse past and present. Its popularity as a resort increased rapidly with the regular presence of the Prince Regent (later William IV) in the early nineteenth century. In the 1960s, it became the scene for battles between rival teenage gangs of young people known as mods and rockers, it was also known for a certain sexual license following WWII, and today has a large and thriving LGBT community, a highly diverse restaurant scene, and Britain's only Green M.P. Thus, Brighton's history makes it an interesting case study, but in reality the activities can be adapted to any location. In the sense that they teach students different ways to reflect upon and interpret their surroundings, they are an ideal, structured process for showing them how to transfer the skills that they learn as part of an LCS course to a real-life scenario.

1. Warm up: Clapping

This activity was part of the Higher Education workshop that took place during the second Biennial Cultural Literacy in Europe Conference (Warsaw, 2017). The warm-up for this activity is generic, lasts up to five minutes and is titled, "1-2-3 Clap." It is short, designed to prepare workshop participants for a collaborative, embodied session. It is important to note that this, like all the activities detailed here, requires an open space free of tables and chairs. The facilitator asks the participants to form a standing circle. They are required to form pairs. The facilitator asks for a volunteer to demonstrate the activity. The idea is to take turns in a count of three, so the facilitator says "1," the volunteer says "2," the facilitator says "3"; then the volunteer says "1," the facilitator says "2," and the volunteer says "3." At this point, the demonstration ends. The pairs now take up the activity. After a minute or so the facilitator stops the activity and call back the volunteer for a new demonstration.

The next demonstration is identical, except that "1" is replaced by a clap. The pairs take up the activity. After a minute or so the facilitator stops the activity and call back the volunteer. This next demonstration, again, is practically identical, except that "2" is replaced by a stamp of the foot. The pairs take up this activity. Again, after a minute or so the facilitator stops the activity and calls back the volunteer. The demonstration is once more identical, except that "3" is replaced by a click of the fingers. The pairs now take up the final activity. The facilitator finishes the warm-up by asking the participants to drop the gestures and return to counting. This activity always creates laughter as simple as it may seem, it is quite difficult to perfect, but it is a good, non-challenging introduction for embodied learning. A short reflective session should be conducted after all these activities, and the warm-up should be no exception. The exercise is intended to stimulate collaboration and provoke thinking about how collaboration works. Often, participants will note this contrast and, they tend to comment on the focus needed on one's partner in order for the exercise to work correctly. They also often note that the activity combines intellectual and embodied activity. In the context of cultural literacy, this warm-up is particularly useful as it requires an unusual degree of focus on others. Participants cannot help but notice difference and similarity. Reading one another for cues is essential for the activity to work.

2. Introductory Activity: A Long Short Walk

At this point, the next activity can be introduced. It represents a move from the highly personal into the more broadly cultural while still insisting on the centrality of the “human element” in the creation of cultural meaning. “A Long Short Walk” requires the facilitator to select a walk, or a number of walks, of around 15 minutes in any environment they choose, but for the purposes of this workshop, it would be in Brighton. A detailed route must be prepared and a precise map given to participants. Participants are split into groups of 3 or 4 and allocated a walk. The key to this activity is that the participants are required to take 45 minutes over a walk that would normally take 15, and take notes as they go. It is vital to stress that progress must be slow. At the end of the walk, the participants return to a central point and are encouraged to create a narrative from their experience. They then show their work to the other groups and the session finishes with a plenary. The activity is amenable to the presentation of results in a number of different forms: the activity can be extended by requiring participants to distil their findings into a still image, or *tableau vivant*, which represents their experience, or a performance might be created, or participants might want to film and edit their experience or produce a written narrative. The “still image,” or *tableau*, is an OSL technique in which participants, typically in groups of three, use their bodies to create an image of an idea they wish to represent. When ready, they have to be silent and hold the pose for thirty seconds to a minute. “Open space” is, again, both literal and figurative as the groups’ conclusions are entirely open, as is their response to the environment with which they interact. In terms of its relationship to cultural literacy, the exercise requires participants to slow down in order to read carefully the semiotics of an environment and the behaviour of the individuals and groups in it. It is an activity that promotes “noticing” as a means of engagement and response. It is very important, too, that the facilitator encourages participants to notice changes in themselves and in their own reactions. The idea that cultural literacy and OSL function in this third space of self and environment—and self and other—is important here.

3. Long Activity: Theory Building

The next activity is known as “theory building.” Theory building requires that the tutor or facilitator prepare in advance a series of laminated images and/or fragments of text. Twelve to fifteen is enough. Each laminate should address some aspect of the session’s subject-matter either directly or tangentially. It is important that the information should not lead participants in too specific a direction, but also that it is appropriate to their levels of knowledge and ability. The exercise is for groups of eight to thirty. The facilitator divides the large group into several smaller groups. The groups are each provided with a set of identical laminates. Each group is required to create a “theory” or “narrative” from the materials and represent this as a pattern on the floor of the space. The facilitator should be ready to step in at various moments to clarify, for example, what the images represent, and where the quotations are taken from. When they are ready, each group invites the other groups, in turn, to enter their space and “read” the theories. This part of the exercise is complete when every group has “read” every other group’s work. The above section lasts anywhere from forty minutes to an hour and can be concluded with a plenary of whatever length the facilitator determines is appropriate—it would usually involve the entire group of participants. It is possible to add two stages to the process. Participants can, again, form a *tableau* or still image of their theory; they can also add movement through an improvised performance. It is also possible to conclude a theory-building exercise with a writing session in which participants articulate their theory in five hundred words.

4. Long Activity 2: A Gastronomic Tour of the World!

This activity is an adaptation of Open-space Learning to cultural literacy. It focuses primarily on visceral sensations of discomfort in relation to unknown cultural artefacts. Like the clapping warm-up, this activity took place during the Higher Education workshop of the second Biennial Cultural Literacy in Europe

Conference and has also been used in the classroom.

The facilitator shows students a PowerPoint presentation with photographs of “exotic dishes” from around the world. Pausing at each slide, the facilitator explains, in detail, what the dish in question consists of, where it is from, and how it is eaten. It is the facilitator’s prerogative to decide what dishes to include for the exercise, but effective past examples have included bird nest soup, the Sardinian cheese *casu marzu*, fried rattlesnake, escargot, haggis, kangaroo, fried grasshoppers, and steak tartare, to mention only a few. After each slide, the students need to answer the following questions with a simple show of hands: Has anyone tried this dish before? Who would try this dish? Who would not try this dish? At the start of the exercise, before the students see the first slide, they are asked to be mindful of what they are feeling/thinking/experiencing, in particular when they see a dish they do not want to try. They do not need to share this with anyone, just be aware of the sensation, whether it be disgust, repulsion, etc.

Once the facilitator has explained the full presentation, students are asked to write a short, two hundred word reflection, on what they experienced when they saw a dish they did not want to try. What were their feelings? Thought? Sensations? This individual reflection is followed by a group discussion where willing students share their reflections and gently interrogate their reactions. If time permits, the same is done for dishes students *were* interested in trying. Why were they drawn to these dishes?

The aim of the activity is for students to question ideas of normality, and to reflect on how they usually react to the unknown. With excitement and a sense of joy? Or is their attitude usually more cautious, restrained? Or is this contextual, depending on the type of “unknown” presented to them? More importantly, why so? What are experiential bases there for these sensations? Are they instinctive? Hard to explain? The students’ reactions are not judged as right or wrong, good or bad. In an Australian context, for example, kangaroo steak is perfectly normal, but it is easy for students to realise that this is not the case in most parts of the world. Where, then, does our sense of safety and familiarity come from? Can “weird” just mean “different”? Have they ever considered that what they would describe as “normal” dishes can be as exotic to a Mexican student as fried grasshoppers are to them? The facilitator explains to students that the reactions experienced during the food exercise can be extrapolated to other cultural scenarios or artefacts when difference, “otherness,” is experienced and that it is important that they become aware of these sensations, and question them. In time, developing this reflective approach as an attitude, as a *modus operandi*, is what challenges notions of ethnocentrism and intolerance, and facilitates interactions in culturally diverse settings.

5. Assessed Activity: Still Image or Tableau

This group activity consists of students creating a still image or tableau based on material presented to them. The material may be in the form of ideas, text, photographs, video, etc. In groups of 4 or 5, students are asked to represent their understanding of the material given to them by collaboratively creating a still image or tableaux with their joined bodies. The materials in this exercise (refer to the Appendix on pp. 20-22 for more information) are designed to guide participants towards a reflective discussion of the idea that culture might be regarded as a geographically situated phenomenon. The exercise does not offer right or wrong answers, but guides participants in their construction of a potentially sophisticated and complex representation of the idea. Again, the mechanics of the activity—its form—demand that participants perform a species of cultural recognition as the only means by which the collaborative activity can be successful.

While it is true that it is the facilitator who chooses the images and quotations, and s/he must be in some way leading the participants, the process can be made more impartial by asking participants to supply an image or phrase themselves before the session. It is also true that what might appear to be a simple exercise can create profound experiences for participants if the facilitator creates materials that allow them to own the narratives they create.

Furthermore, the final element of the exercise, a *tableau vivant*, brings the two artificially divided notions of embodiment and intellectual activity back into closer proximity. What is most powerful in this exercise is the move students make from individual reflection to collaborative reflection, to changes in

those reflections, to the shared embodiment of an idea. The phase in which participants are asked to make a *tableau*, or still-image, of the idea they have represented in images and text on the floor, is always the most challenging. The requirement is that they should all be in physical contact with one another and that they should be silent in the final moment of presentation. All other possibilities are open to them. It is only after careful preparation during and prior to the session that participants will feel confident and engaged enough to work in these ways. This includes the selection of the right kind of space for these activities (Monk). An example of how these *tableaux* have worked is a session in which the facilitator's aim was for the students to understand the concept of hegemony. This in-class activity was carried out in groups of three students. One student in a particular group of three was blindfolded by the other two before being led around the room, then stopping at the moment the facilitator counted them down to stillness to form a natural pose on the floor. The "third," blindfolded student reached out towards the dominant two, meeting fingertip-to-fingertip, with an extraordinary expression on her face, a combination of gratitude and puzzlement, but subtler and more varied than this. The readers from the other groups were struck by some kind of "authenticity" that clung to the image, and participants reported that they *knew* this concept, through *feeling* it, better and in a radically more meaningful way than they might have done before. If we were asked for a "learning outcome" we might say that "participants are forced by the nature of the activity to engage. It both promotes collective action and encourages a sense of individual responsibility. It deepens understanding of the subject matter and provides a platform for later, more detailed discussion." Additional learning outcomes may be broader and, in this case, related to the specifics of the exercise in cultural geography that is at the heart of the session. Learning outcomes such as these might be monitored by asking participants to keep "reflective notes" during the course of the session. The facilitator should pause at six or seven points during the workshop in order to provide time for participants to record their reflections in notebooks provided for the purpose. It should be made clear to the participants what the learning outcomes are, and how they relate to the subject matter. Above all, it should be made clear that the journals should be immediate, unrevised, and reflective of a process of change in ideas and experience. Alternatively, participants may be invited at the end of the session to write 500 words, either as a group or as individuals. If these pieces are to be assessed, the facilitator has the choice of gathering the work and providing feedback later. Or the situation at the end of an OSL session such as this is optimum for a peer assessment exercise. The participants will already have exchanged and embodied ideas, and otherwise collaborated, in a mutually-supportive atmosphere in which a significant degree of trust will have been built up. They should be provided with very specific lists of grading criteria, and work should be anonymised before each student provides feedback on a reflective notebook that is not their own. At the final stage, the facilitator collects the notebooks and moderates the peer assessment.

Conclusion

OSL may be considered an unorthodox teaching approach by most standards of traditional higher education, particularly given its focus on embodiment. This unorthodoxy is precisely what makes OSL techniques good vehicles for teaching cultural literacy because they destabilise students' preconceptions of the learning experience. In the context of OSL, the learning experience is always in flux, the terrain always shifting, and knowledge is shaped by the interaction of students and facilitators in relation to context and cultural artefact. The outcome of the learning experience is not predetermined, so the experience of destabilisation opens the way to new knowledge, forged through the meeting of pre-existing knowledge and the experience in the learning space. The destabilising experience sits outside the expectations of students who, even if they are familiar with OSL as a technique, cannot pre-prepare for the learning moment. This enables the possibility of engaging with difference and the unknown in a positive, reflective way. When adapted appropriately, as seen above, the practice-based models of OSL allow students to acquire the skills to engage with new or unknown cultural artefacts and read, understand and draw meaning from these artefacts. This, in turn, develops their competency as culturally literate individuals and helps them to navigate better new scenarios of cultural uncertainty.

Appendix

The following materials and quotes were used for Assessed Activity:

1. A photograph of Brighton Pavilion.
2. Two illustrations of an eighteenth-century dandy.
3. A photograph of the journalist Julie Burchill (a figure who courts controversy).
4. A bar chart of the 2010 election result in the Brighton Pavilion constituency.
5. A reproduction of a front cover of the *Evening Argus* (the local newspaper) from the 1960s describing the “Battle of Brighton,” in which fifty people were arrested after running fights on the seafront between mods and rockers.
6. A photograph of the Brighton Gay Pride March.
7. A photograph of Victorian “bathing machines” on Brighton beach, dating from the 1880s.
8. A representation of Bourdieu’s schematic of the notion of “taste.”
9. A reproduction of advertising from Brighton’s Pelirocco Hotel, which seems to perpetuate the idea of Brighton as a destination for “dirty weekends.”
10. A photograph of the Grand Hotel in the immediate aftermath of the 1984 IRA bombing.
11. A line graph of reportable crime statistics for Brighton and Hove 2006 to 2010.
12. A bar chart showing changes in population by age in Brighton, 2001 to 2010.
13. A reproduction of a flyer from the Squatting Support Group advocating the occupation of empty properties in Brighton.
14. A photograph of the celebrity Katie Price (Jordan), who lives in Brighton.

The following quotations:

1. “A society that moulds its entire surroundings has necessarily evolved its own technique for working on the material basis of this set of tasks. That material basis is the society’s actual territory. Urbanism is the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism, which, true to its logical development toward absolute domination, can (and now must) refashion the totality of space into its own peculiar *écor*” (Guy Debord).
2. “As natural “reflectors” that return awareness to the source from which it springs, places also provide points from which to look out on life, to grasp one’s position in the order of things, to contemplate events from somewhere in particular ... places consist in what gets made of them—in anything and everything they are taken to be—and their disembodied voices, immanent though inaudible, are merely those of people speaking silently to themselves” (Keith H. Basso).
3. “Brighton is the new suburbs; the Metroland of the Nineties, a honeypot for the tired, muddled masses from Hackney, Camberwell and Shepherd’s Bush. It is the latest destination in the demographics of disillusion” (Oliver Bennett).
4. “He loved the sight of fine forest trees however, and detested Brighthelmstone Downs [Brighton], ‘because it was a country so truly desolate (he said), that if one had a mind to hang one’s self for desperation at being obliged to live there, it would be difficult to find a tree on which to fasten the rope’” (Samuel Johnson).
5. “People look and take sight, take seeing, for life itself. We build on the basis of papers and plans. We buy on the basis of images. Sight and seeing, which in the Western tradition once epitomised intelligibility, have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social space, diversity may be simulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sign of transparency” (Henri Lefebvre).
6. “The habitus—embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (Pierre Bourdieu).
7. “This City is what it is because our citizens are what they are” (Plato).
8. “With immense labour and immense patience they extricated from the long day the grain of pleasure: this sun, the music, the rattle of the miniature cars, the ghost train diving between the grinning skeletons under the Aquarium promenade, the sticks of Brighton rock, the paper sailors” (Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock*).

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