



German: Discovering German culture through song

A course in intermediate level German by Dr. Bernd Conrad, Northern Arizona University (1991)

Course Design:

Dr. Conrad's course reflects the widespread use of authentic texts to redirect language courses from the traditional emphasis on linguistic mechanics to the contemporary goal of communicative competence. Towards this end, the course uses a content-based approach to teach German through popular culture. Although the course makes use of numerous newspaper and magazine articles, the primary vehicle it employs for exploring German culture is popular music.

Popular songs address a wide spectrum of themes related to historical and contemporary German culture; they confront, through different approaches, the major political, social, and moral issues of modern Germany. Course activities in a unit, such as German perceptions of foreigners, are sequenced into four major stages. In the first stage, topic preparation, students brainstorm what they know about the subject; they discuss personal experiences, practice discursive features of speech, and engage in conversational management. In the second stage, topic introduction, the topic is presented with a short lecture and/or with a song. Both the first and second stages serve to linguistically and conceptually prepare students for the feature song.

The third stage, topic comprehension, students carefully listen to the song several times, look up new vocabulary, speculate on the topic as presented by the song, abstract generalizations from the song about the topic, and discuss the underlying messages of the song. In the final stage of each unit, topic expansion, students work in groups to discuss readings from newspapers and magazines regarding critical treatments of the topic as well a statistical information. The unit ends with a written test on which students can choose to analyze the topic as presented in one of several texts forms including articles, cartoons, or song lyrics. As a whole, each unit serves to integrate listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills within a particular cultural theme.

Higher Level Learning:

The theme-based approach and cultural focus of Dr. Conrad's course allows students to strengthen their linguistic skills (**Acting**) while exploring German cultural questions (**Others**). The course emphasizes comparing student experiences and

perceptions with the experiences and perceptions of their German peers (**Connecting, Self and Others**).

Active Learning:

Each unit balances student interaction with the topic and student analysis of German interaction with the topic (**Doing and Observing**). Students discuss their understanding of German culture in small groups (**Dialogue with Others**) and critically examine authentic texts for a better understanding of different German perspectives.

Conrad, B. (1991). Contemporary and Historical Contexts in Popular Music: Theory and Implementation of an Intermediate Level Course. Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German,24 (pp.18-29). Cherry Hill, NJ: American Association of Teachers of German.