



Teaching the Millennium Development Goals

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In the year 2000, the United Nations assessed the state of global society and drew up a 15-year plan to make improvements in eight different categories of social and economic development in the developing world. As the year 2015 approaches, it seems an appropriate time to take stock of what has been happening and to see how materials that have been created may be exploited to full advantage in our global English classrooms.

The *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) were divided into eight main categories, each with a number of sub-groups. The categories are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

A visit to the United Nations website allows you to download PDF files concerning these goals as a whole as well as files for each individual goal. The material includes extensive information about the sub-groups in each category. An example of this is the information about providing clean water and sanitation in the 7th goal and data on Third World debt in the 8th category (to name but two).

At this point, the challenges facing the EFL teacher immediately become apparent. There are masses of material accompanied by a certain amount of 'UN speak'. At the same time, the potential for creating a dynamic and rewarding learning environment is clear. This is a treasure trove of linguistic opportunity and provides eye-opening insights into the state of our planet. So the keywords are 'adjust and simplify' to match the linguistic levels of your classes.

First: vocabulary. This need not be as extensive or daunting as you might think. I was able to reduce this to 15-20 keywords for an intermediate class. Taught over a semester and regularly reinforced with matching exercises, crosswords and other tasks, this was not a big problem.

Secondly, graphs. 'If a picture speaks a thousand words, a graph will speak two thousand' (Confucius). The graphs and charts are

very clear and colourful and easy to understand to the point of being self explanatory. Paste them into your own lesson worksheets.

Finally, the text. Admittedly, this is the most challenging aspect as some definitions are complicated and some language is correspondingly specialized. However, much of the information is clear and can be reduced to simple bullet points or short, informative sentences.

Once your editorial choices have been made, a wide range of educational options present themselves. In addition to the rich potential for teaching a straightforward, content-based course, the material lends itself readily to some very specific lexical areas and skill sets. For examples, students can describe the situation as it was at the outset of the MDGs (past tense). They can practice talking about the current conditions (present progressive) and daily lifestyles of those affected (present simple). Following the progress of the MDGs allows them to practice present perfect tenses while speculating about the outcomes of the programs allows them to use the future and future perfect tenses. Comparatives and superlatives can easily be incorporated into this scenario.

Descriptive skills and (powerpoint) presentation skills may also feature prominently in this kind of work which also lends itself to autonomous research, group projects and discussions. Indeed, imaginative teachers and learners may find that the learning environment provided by the MDGs are almost limitless.

Finally, next year will see the MDG project reach its conclusion. It will be a time when the world's media will focus closely on its successes and shortcomings. To give our students a headstart on such an area of enormous global significance is to give them a sense of belonging to the global community as well as to provide them with the linguistic wherewithal which will allow them to function and communicate about world topics of enormous significance in the international forum that is 'global issues'.

United Nations Millennium Development Goals <www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

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