



## Teaching Fair Trade with Fair Teaching

by Michael Holsworth (Kyoto Sangyo University, Japan)



### Introduction

This article explains how the topic of Fair Trade can be dealt with in content-based English courses from a Learner Centered approach. It introduces five key changes needed for learner-centered teaching and discusses how these were applied to a content-based university EFL course about Fair Trade. Details on the course, syllabus, assessment and results are described below.

### Five Key Changes

Weimer (2013) introduced five key changes to practice in order to shift to a learner-centered teaching approach. These involve (1) the role of the teacher, (2) the balance of power, (3) the function of content, (4) the responsibility for learning, and (5) the purpose and processes of evaluation. These changes were used as guidelines in the planning and teaching of the “Fair Trade” content-based course that I designed. Throughout the course planning and the term, these five keys were utilized as a framework for reference.

The first key change involves *the role of the teacher*. In my course, this clearly shifted from a traditional director to that of a guide or facilitator.

The second key change is *the balance of power*. In the course, there was a clear transfer of power from the teacher to the students, but this was not 100%. Instead, there was a sharing of power between the teacher and students. Input and opinions from students had a direct impact on the course content and assessment.

The *function of content* was as a point of research and discovery. Students weren’t expected to cover a pre-set amount of material from a textbook. The course content was determined as the course progressed based on the needs of the students. The presentations and final exam were designed to allow students to showcase what they learned, not how much they could remember.

The *responsibility for learning* was also shared with students. Giving some control over classroom decisions to students is necessary to develop responsibility for their learning (Scharle & Szabo, 2000). In this, I assisted students with research, but success in their presentations or in the *Fair Trade Café* event rested primarily upon them and the decisions they made as a group. This meant there was a clear potential for failure; however, this motivated students and gave them a strong sense of responsibility and accountability.

Finally, let’s consider *the purpose and processes of evaluation*. In this course, student assessment was a combination of teacher and peer input. For example, for the two presentations, scores from students and the teacher were used to produce a final score. The purpose of assessment was seen by the students as a way to assess their own learning, but the process was done in a more traditional teacher-centered approach. The main reason for this is that peer assessment requires practice and training to be objective and fair.

### The Fair Trade Course

#### Student Presentations

Students gave two presentations on Fair Trade topics. Each presentation was in English with a focus on content, but grading came from both English ability and content. The presentations had no time limit imposed, but each presenter was expected to speak for a minimum of 5 minutes regardless if they were in pairs or an individual. Class time was given for research, group discussion and preparation for these presentations.

The first presentation focused on products and their relationship to Fair Trade. There were also content criteria such as the reason for social or economic problems related to the product, why the product is associated with Fair Trade, and what Fair Trade does for the product. Since the second presentation involved research about the Japanese context and Fair Trade, students were encouraged to do research outside of class time. Many students visited shops, called or e-mailed companies and spoke with distributors who were involved with Fair Trade products in Japan.

#### Fair Trade Café

As part of the course, a three-day *Fair Trade Café* was held during lunch hour in the university cafeteria. I provided a framework for this with timelines, university requirements and rules. The students brainstormed ideas of what the event should include and what products should be sold.

Next, students divided into three groups. The first group focused on supplies for the event. These included Fair Trade coffee, chocolate and stick-sugar. The second group focused on posters and other promotional materials, such as menus and flyers. The final group was responsible for creating a survey, administering it to participants during the event and

following up with any questions. As the teacher, I was responsible for contacting *Fair Trade Japan* and ordering materials to promote the event such as t-shirts, posters, flyers, stickers and clear file-folders.

In order to develop a sense of responsibility, it was negotiated that students would select the amount of items needed and determine the exact costs upfront, then set the prices for the items, and determine how much must be sold in order to break even or make a profit. It was made very clear to students that the initial costs would be paid by the university. However, by the end, those costs had to be paid back from the profits.

This pressure added to students' motivation and commitment to the success of the event. In other words, if they didn't make enough profit to pay back the university for the upfront costs, they would be responsible for the difference. To help support them, the university provided the equipment needed for the event.

This 3-day *Fair Trade Café* was the most ambitious part of the course and it was the first time for students to organize this type of event. Therefore, I took a guidance role providing students with feedback, managing timeline constraints, and giving decision-making support. This valuable experience provided students with exposure to accountability and responsibility for their own decisions.

#### Assessment

For evaluation, we negotiated the weighting for the assignments and assessment for the course. Students settled on each presentation accounting for 30% of the final grade, the event accounting for 20% and the final exam accounting for 20%.

#### Results

Two different surveys were conducted as part of the course. The first survey was created and distributed by the students. It identified whether other students who came to the café were aware of Fair Trade, if they learned about Fair Trade from this event, and if they enjoyed the chocolate and the coffee that was sold.

The second survey was produced by me and was given to students taking the Fair Trade course. This survey sought to identify if students saw value in the course content and in the student-centered learning experience. It also asked if they would like to participate in similar courses in future.

Following are some sample comments from the survey that represent the overall feeling of the students who participated in the course.

One student wrote,

*"Student lead style is important because with just teacher talking and student listening, then the end of the class many students are sleeping. But this style of learning means everyone is talking, feeling fun, is interested. So that is why I like Fair Trade course."*

This comment highlights that student-led courses are not common at this university. It also touches on the positive reaction the student had to this learning context. A second student wrote,

*"The course content was very good. This university don't have student-lead style classes, so it was fun. The two research projects were good. We could learn about Fair Trade and more. The Fair Trade Café was also good. I enjoyed it very much and I think other students did too."*

A sample comment demonstrating the learning of transferable skills gained from the course comes from another student who wrote,

*"I had a great experience through the Fair Trade. I enjoyed this course and had valuable activities. I wanted to take such a great course. I will use this course in my future for sure."*

#### Conclusion

Teaching students about global issues in a content-based context provides a challenge for both teacher and students. After reading this article, I hope that teachers will be inspired and think of ways to approach Fair Trade as a possible topic for content-based instruction. In addition, I hope that the pedagogical approach of Learner-Centered teaching will also provide food for thought.

#### References:

Scharle, A., & Szabo, A. (2000). *Learner autonomy: A guide to developing learner responsibility*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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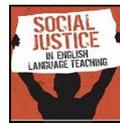
#### Fair Trade Japan

<www.fairtrade-jp.org>

This website (in Japanese) provides fair trade goods and information.

 <p><b>World Fair Trade Organization</b> &lt;<a href="http://wfto.com">http://wfto.com</a>&gt;</p> <p>Check this site to learn about Fair Trade, its history, aims and goals, and the key principles of fair trade</p>	 <p><b>Fair Trade International</b> &lt;<a href="http://www.fairtrade.net">www.fairtrade.net</a>&gt;</p> <p>This site is a great place to learn about Fair Trade, fair trade products and the fair trade movement.</p>	 <p><b>World Fair Trade Day</b> ( May 14, 2016 )</p> <p>May 14 is <i>World Fair Trade Day</i>. Join your students to plan an event for your school or community!</p>
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 <p><b>Fair Trade Videos</b> (on-line) &lt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a>&gt;</p> <p>Go to Youtube and type in “Fair Trade” to see all the great video clips, TED talks and info available</p>	 <p><b>Books about Fair Trade</b> &lt;<a href="http://www.amazon.com">www.amazon.com</a>&gt;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Fair Trade (Explore!)</i> - Powell</li> <li>▪ <i>No Nonsense Guide to Fair Trade</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Fair Trade: A Beginner's Guide</i></li> </ul>	 <p><b>People Tree</b> (Japan) &lt;<a href="http://www.peopletree.co.jp">www.peopletree.co.jp</a>&gt;</p> <p>Take a look at this Japanese fair trade site to see the variety of fair trade fashions and goods on sale.</p>
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