



Global Awareness and Peace Building through EFL

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Introduction

This article reports on a 1-year content-based English course designed on global issue themes for the International Studies Department of Tokai University in Japan. The course is required for all 2nd year students and is taught in cooperation with the Foreign Language Center. It was originally conceived and instituted in the mid-1990s and has undergone considerable revision since then. I have taught the course every year since its inception.

The 2nd year English language program at Tokai university consists of four classes a week: two classes (reading and listening) are taught by Japanese teachers and two classes (writing and speaking) by non-Japanese English teachers.

The primary objectives of the writing and speaking course are to train students in public speaking and research essay writing through the study of current world issues with a unifying theme of interdependence and peace building.

At the moment there is one set of materials for all students. There are five classes streamed into high, low and intermediate levels. A team of five Japanese and five non-Japanese teachers work in pairs managing one class through the entire year. The top class generally works individually while lower level classes are smaller, with more pair and team work, and more Japanese used by teachers.

Theme #1: “Peacemakers”

The spring semester introduces students to this one-year content-based course. After ‘getting to know you’ warm ups, students start the first unit on “Peacemakers” setting the overall theme of the year’s study. This unit concentrates on the Nobel Peace Prize. Students are given the chance to choose one Nobel Peace Prize winner from a list provided, research that winner’s life, background and accomplishments, write a five paragraph essay and give a five minute speech to the class.

Most students have never written a research paper before, so instruction on Internet research and correct use of endnotes is presented. This continues throughout the year. All International Studies students are expected to research and write a graduation thesis in their 4th year, so this 2nd year course serves an important departmental objective besides English instruction and current issues.

For balance, the list of Nobel Peace Prize winners provided to students is divided into three sections: men, women and organizations. This includes all 11 women peace prize winners, all 12 institutional winners and the 12 most recent men to have won the prize, giving a total of 35 winners for students to choose from. No class has been larger than 28 students so far. Therefore, the list is limited, diverse, both historical and up-to-date, and as non-sexist as possible. Each student (or in lower classes, each pair of students) chooses one Nobel Peace Prize winner to research, write an essay on, and present a speech about to the class.

This initial unit includes instruction in computer research, issues concerning plagiarism, and basic essay construction. Students are given model essay examples on both a single winner (Martin Luther King, 1964) and an organization (The Pugwash Conference, 1995). For in-class conversation activities or guided speaking, there are information exchange exercises on Alfred Nobel’s life and on conflict resolution, including the Norwegian Peace Process and the *ubuntu* peace and reconciliation efforts in South Africa and Rwanda. In the coming year, a guided discussion or debate on Chinese activist Liu Xiaobo’s peace prize award controversy is likely.

Theme #2: “Environment”

The second half of the semester shifts to the theme of “Environment.” This is a more difficult and challenging topic than the first, and difficult to make students understand its link to Peace Studies. The unit starts with a simplified “card game” debate on differences between environmental concerns in developing and developed countries. The unit highlights environmental controversies between rich countries’ interests (and sometimes hypocrisy) and poorer countries’ resource needs, and presents the basic conflicts that arise internationally concerning environmental issues.

The unit focuses on four basic issues - Forests, Fish, Food, and Energy – and involves much reading and discussion. Each issue comprises 8 to 10 short articles, covering roughly 8 pages each. The articles are condensed from a variety of sources giving information and views on each issue. Controversies concerning each topic are presented, so various viewpoints are considered. Each unit of reading is followed by 40 to 45 questions in the order covered in the readings.

Students are divided into teams for each topic, and each team member is given a sequential portion of questions to answer. The students find the section of the readings that answer their questions and come back to class to share their answers with their team. The second step involves students from the four topics of *Forests, Fish, Food* and *Energy* to regroup and share information on their topics. Finally, students, individually or in pairs, choose one topic of interest to research, write an essay about, and do an oral presentation on. In this way, the class engages students in information exchange on a broad range of environmental issues, allows them to choose a topic to research from a full range of topics and also works to limit individual reading loads and maximize oral reporting. The variety of opinions offered on the issues through the readings enables students to present and argue for their own views.

Theme #3: “Human Rights”

The fall semester introduces issues connected to human rights. Warm up activities ask students to name films, books, people and organizations they know of which are connected with human rights. They are then given a list of 30 basic human rights, simplified from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), and asked to match them to photos portraying violations, affirmations, or symbols of those rights.

Students are then shown a list of countries and asked (in pairs) to choose one country to research together. The countries are divided up among the five classes, and each class receives a different list. Each team works together to research the background of their country such as explaining its location, size, wealth, and social conditions, and to study human rights issues in that country.

The pairs then choose one human rights issue in their country, research it and write an essay on it. Last, they create a Powerpoint presentation to introduce their country and to graphically explain the human right issue they researched. The Powerpoint adds another layer of interest to their research, encourages their audience to pay closer attention and adds the challenge of giving talks which address the audience rather than the screen.

Theme #4: “Millennium Development Goals”

The final half of the fall semester deals with the United Nations’ “Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs). This brings together all of the previous topics and hopefully gives students a sense of completion for the course, dedicated as it is to learning about global issues with the purpose of understanding the challenges and possibilities of solving global problems and building peaceful solutions to international issues.

This unit builds on the country research that students did previously. Pairs of students keep their country and human rights focus. They are introduced to the Millennium Development Goals through a debate-and-matching exercise where students match opposing claims to understand which arguments support and oppose the MDGs.

The primary activities of this unit are for pairs or small groups to create “Action Plans” for solving the human rights problems they researched in the earlier unit. The action plan is a shortened version of a JICA training tool which involves:

- incorporating *background issues*
- defining basic *goals* and *objectives* for solving or alleviating the problem
- explaining the *impacts* of the plan
- making an *action outline* for what will happen
- identifying *obstacles* that might slow down or pose problems for the plan

Teams must also produce a persuasive speech to support their action plan as well as a Powerpoint to illustrate elements of their plan and highlight key information in their speech. This aspect of the course allows students to use their imaginations as well as build on their previous study. The final event of the year is for all five classes to meet and for one group from each class to present its action plan, speech, and Powerpoint.

As described earlier, this one-year global issues course is an outgrowth of a program that began many years ago and is undergoing revision. The program has some problems. The final unit has high productivity demands on students, and takes time to complete. Coordination between teachers is sometimes not optimal. The structure of the “Environment” unit is different from the other units and relies more on prescribed readings.

Nonetheless, it is hoped that the study of globally significant issues related to the peace and well being of the earth, and of all those living on it, will encourage and motivate students in their study of English and help to deepen their awareness of the world in which they live.

This article is based on a presentation given by the author at the December 2010 PGL (Peace as a Global Language) conference in Tokyo, Japan.

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