

Think Local, Act Local: Designing a Peace Education Course

by Jennifer Yphantides (Kanda University of International Studies, Japan)

Background

I work as an instructor in the International Communication Department at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, Japan. Our department is only 8 years old and has just over 600 students. During the first two years, students do basic speaking, reading and writing classes that help to prepare them for the content-based electives they take in the third and fourth years.

The end of last semester marked the final year of the *Global Issues* EFL course that I designed for our English Department. In a bid to provide students with a greater variety of elective classes, the administration requires teachers who have been running their content-based language courses for more than two academic years to develop new ones. While the prospect seemed daunting at first, once I started thinking about what to do, I appreciated the chance to reconsider student needs in my context and to reevaluate what my goals were in teaching content-based EFL.

My Global Issues Course

When I started working at Kanda two years ago, I opened a *Global Issues* elective class for the English Department as a pilot course. The first class had 18 students enrolled. In my second year, I began teaching *Global Issues* in both the English Department and IC Department, and have an average enrollment of 30 students per class, which is full capacity. The courses last one semester (14 weeks, with two 90 minute meetings per week).

During the semester, we cover a variety of issues that affect people around the globe and pay particular attention to how these issues are inter-connected. After using the war in Darfur as a case study of interconnection, we branch out into other regions of the world and do interactive lessons on the environment, human migration, discrimination, “terrorism”, poverty, AIDS, child soldiers, human trafficking, fair trade, and human rights.

Developing a Peace Education Course

Because this class has now been discontinued, I decided to focus on developing the framework for a *Peace Education* course, what I consider to be a natural extension of the work I have done so far. While both Peace Education and Global Issues invite students to explore social responsibility, I wanted to

develop a new course that would differ from my *Global Issues* class in two significant ways. First, while the main focus of GI was raising awareness, the primary goal of the new course would be to focus specifically on peace, to have students consider what peace means to them, and to ask students how they can personally create a culture of peace in their own immediate environment. Second, as the first point implies, the focus of the new course would be on the local rather than the global. This is important because during the three years I spent teaching *Global Issues*, I felt that one of the main challenges in asking students to think about what is happening around the world is that they have not had the opportunity to fully consider certain issues in the local context and, as a result, they don't have a solid point of reference on which to base their opinions and ideas. For example, in one *Global Issues* class we studied about the problems faced by new immigrants in the United States. After much discussion, the students determined that this was a context-specific issue rooted in the history of racial tension in America. When I asked the students about problems faced by second or third generation Brazilian immigrants in Japan, many students were unaware of why they had come here and what troubles they experience on a daily basis. Because of this apparent gap in knowledge of local issues, I have decided to explore the local context using the prism of Peace Education.

Peace Education: The Five P's

In developing the framework for this Peace Education course, I've decided to combine several features that I have used successfully in other classes. For simplicity, I call them the five P's.

(1) Peer Talk:

I plan to open each class with a 10 minute “peer talk” session during which time students discuss an issue connected to Peace Education in the local context. Each lesson, one student will be responsible for giving me a topic and telling the class why it is important to them. I chose this feature for three reasons. First, it helps students take ownership of the class by creating some of the curriculum. Second, it's a good warm-up time both for using English and for getting into the subject. Third, there are some problems with lateness and having a warm-up like this means students will be able to come into the class, see the topic on the board, and begin immediately.

(2) Person of Peace:

After the peer talk session, one student will introduce a person of peace to the class from the local context. This person can be a family member, a friend, a local celebrity, a historical figure, etc. The student will introduce this “person of peace” and explain their contribution. Hopefully, this will help students develop some confidence in speaking out in front of the class. Also, it personalizes the lesson for students and develops their awareness of what is being done at the local level for peace.

(3) Projects:

The main part of the course will be to work on projects with other class members. Students will stay together for the duration of a project, then switch groups when a new project begins. Hopefully, this will help students get to know each other more deeply than when they are just put into random groups at the beginning of each class. I have several topics to propose to the students.

- ◆ First is the writing of a peace-themed graded reader to be published by the university library and put on display in the self access-learning center. Writing the graded reader would involve some knowledge of the General Service word list and how different publishers determine reader levels. Also, it would involve some consideration of a theme and how to creatively voice that theme. In order to choose their topic, it is hoped that students will be able to interview people close to them to get their ideas. It is also hoped that students will read their books to the people that inspired them.
- ◆ Second is the building of a display for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. This would provide students with an opportunity of revisiting a familiar topic but also allow them to add their own voices to the narratives presented at the museum. There are some directions for developing displays on the museum website. Hopefully when these projects are finished, we will be able to invite students from other classes to visit our own mini Peace Museum.
- ◆ Third is to plan a Peace Boat voyage that makes stops only in Japan. Students will have the chance to choose one region of the country, research it, find a topic connected to peace and plan activities for a stop in their region. It is hoped that when the students have completed their sections of this project, we will be able to simulate a Peace Boat

voyage in the classroom, with each group leading the activities for the stop in their region.

At the beginning of the semester, students will have the opportunity of hearing in detail about the projects I propose. They will also have the chance to propose any additional projects they think would fit into the theme of the course. Depending on their needs and interests, we will include as many student-generated ideas as time allows.

(4) Presentations:

In the past, I have invited guest speakers to my classes from organizations like JICA (*Japan's Peace Corps*), Peace Boat, the Tokyo chapter of Amnesty International, and the NGO Peace Winds Japan. Hopefully, the students and I will be able to recruit more guests to visit us as their talks usually make the topics covered in the curriculum really come alive for the students. Presentations are always very well done and students can apply what they have learned about good delivery to their own project presentations.



(5) Practice:

While students will have many opportunities in class and outside to gather information, discuss issues and develop their creativity, it is also important for them to have the chance to reflect as individuals on what we do in groups. During the course, I will ask students to keep a journal in which they will write their reactions to the material we study and how this can help them to foster peace on a personal level in their own lives.

I have made a proposal to give a workshop at the national JALT conference in Nagoya that will feature some of the lesson plans used in this course. If the proposal is accepted, I hope you will join me so I can share more details of my Peace Education course with you. I look forward to seeing you at the Global Issues GILE SIG forum in November and to a fruitful exchange of ideas.

Jennifer Yphantides

Kanda University of International Studies,
Chiba, Japan E-mail: <yphantides1@yahoo.ca>