



Teaching Global Issues via TED Lite

by Anthony Lavigne (Kansai Gaidai University, Osaka)



Introduction

The website TED.com has exploded in popularity in recent years and increasingly found its way into classrooms of a variety of disciplines. As teachers consider effective methods of instruction that introduce current information and attempt to adequately prepare students to be active participants in their future, they can realize their responsibility to contribute to a better world by allowing students access not only to the language, but also to the skills necessary to further peace, development, and a healthier planet.

Over the last four years, my colleagues and I at Kansai Gaidai University have used TED.com in our teaching to allow students to discover the world autonomously, collaborate with their peers, and heighten their awareness of some of today's most pertinent global issues. This article is an expansion of ideas presented in *Blended learning: An evolving praxis* (Fogal, Graham, and Lavigne, in press) and will describe an activity that provides students with exposure to important topics, while employing English as a tool of social awareness.

TED Lite

TED Lite is a classroom-friendly approach to teaching English that has EFL students choose a video from TED.com, which they ultimately will teach to their peers. Prior to their presentation, students write a 1-page report about their video containing a summary, opinion, vocabulary and 3 discussion questions. The talk that students deliver is 15 minutes long. This requires students to introduce the video's theme to their classmates, discuss the opinions given in the speaker's message, teach new vocabulary items mined from the script, and lead their peer group through a discussion which moves beyond the TED video and connects its theme to the lives of the students.

Choosing a video

The TED.com collection of video speeches continues to grow every week. This provides a rich variety of topics from which teachers can direct students to find videos that fit their theme of study. Students can also select videos that pique their interest. For *Ted Lite*, each student chooses a video, then claims it by entering their choice on the university's LMS. Before they choose, I take time in class to show them how to navigate to the 'talks' page and use the filters (eg. subtitles, length, topic, etc.) in order to find the best-suited video.

Breaking it down

After students have chosen their video, their first task is to deconstruct it and prepare to present it to their peers. To assist them, I offer a process for how to do this. I suggest they watch the video once in their native language, then again using English subtitles. After they do this, I tell them it's a good time to brainstorm and to get their initial thoughts down on paper. Next, I have them begin to create an outline, highlighting the main points of the speech. As they refine this, they can begin to summarize their long video into one paragraph.

Summary

To summarize the video message, I remind students to talk about key concepts, not details. Information such as numbers and dates are often not as important as ideas and concepts. Finally, their summary conclusion should state the main ideas of the whole speech. The exercise of having students summarize a long video into an organized one-paragraph written summary allows ample opportunity for skill improvement.

Impression

Next, students are asked to write a paragraph that effectively illustrates their opinion and why they feel that way. At first, students begin their 'impression' paragraph by stating their overall opinion about the TED talk and giving a preview of the reasons that support their opinion. In order to support their opinion, I invite them to write about something that they read or learned, an experience they had which created their beliefs and influenced their opinion, and/or any relevant factual information. Students conclude this 'impression' paragraph by restating their overall opinion as well as their strongest supporting reason for why they feel their opinion is valid.

Vocabulary

For the vocabulary task, I direct students to search the video script again and notice any words or phrases that seemed especially relevant to the talk. I let them know that vocabulary terms don't necessarily have to be the biggest or most abstract words that were used, but perhaps a word they knew that was used in a different context, or an idiom or expression they heard that caught their attention. I ask them to summarize these vocabulary terms on their report by listing the terms followed by a definition in their own words.

Discussion questions

I believe the discussion questions to be the most valuable aspect of *TED Lite* because this is where the words of the TED speaker (a stranger) become meaningful as each student interacts with the content. I offer them the following outline for how to create fruitful discussion questions.

- For the first question, I ask them to write a personalized question connecting the video's theme to the lives of their peers. For example, if their TED video talks about building a sustainable home, a good discussion question might be, "How is your home sustainable / not sustainable?"
- For the second question, students should attempt to connect their video's theme with their home country, their culture and their fellow citizens. For example, if the video they choose is about pesticides used on farms in the United States, students might ask, "How much do farmers in Japan use pesticides? How do Japanese people feel about the use of pesticides on their food?"
- For the third question, I have students ask about how their video theme is relevant to the global community. For example, if their video talks about hunger in Africa, students could ask, "In what other areas of the world is hunger a problem? How can people in developed countries help with this problem?" I let students know that the discussion can be where the most valuable learning takes place and urge them to give some thought to developing fruitful questions on their video theme.

Submission

Several days prior to their presentation day, students are asked to complete and submit a one-page report about their video. This allows teachers the opportunity to check for things such as word processing formatting, writing skills, appropriate content, student preparedness, and a variety of other factors. In addition to this report, the other writing components of *TED Lite* consist of making a student handout and a notecard.

Student Handout

The student handout is what presenters give to their classmates after finishing their summary and impression. This contains the TED speaker's name and video title, vocabulary terms, and discussion questions. I ask students to create a simple vocabulary activity (eg. matching or cloze) in order to activate their classmates' minds when learning the new terms. I also have them list their discussion questions on the handout as well. Often, if other students can read the questions, they can more easily understand what is being asked of them.

Notecard

During the presentation, I encourage students to speak naturally and to connect with their audience, but not to read from a script. To accomplish this, I allow them the use of only a notecard when delivering their summary and impression. I briefly let them know that notecards for speeches should have bulleted or numbered phrases using keywords and not full sentences.

Presentation

The focal point of *TED Lite* is a 15-minute student presentation. This is broken into 4 sections.

1. First, students are given 3 minutes to summarize their video.
2. Second, they have 3 minutes to convey their impression.
3. Next, 3 minutes are allotted for them to introduce their vocabulary terms and have their peers work through the activity on the student handout.
4. Finally, 6 minutes are allotted for discussion.

I provide students with several strategies for how to get their audience involved in the presentation. After they deliver the summary, I suggest that presenters stop to check in with their group members and ask if they've understood the video message before moving on. Following their impression, students can ask their peers, "What do you think?" This breaks up the monotony of the lecture-style lesson, in which most minds wander after a few minutes. By having group members share their thoughts, the TED theme, which has been chosen for them, suddenly becomes person-ally meaningful. Finally, during the discussion questions, I encourage group leaders to keep the conversation moving by (a) monitoring if all students are speaking equally, asking 5W questions¹ to extend the discussion, and (b) by using active listening² to allow the conversation to develop its personal relevance for the group.

Assessment

During the presentation, all students are provided with an assessment form which contains sections for self-assessment as well as for peer-assessment. I also have a space for students to write a number grade, as well as write any comments. Naturally, these assessment guidelines can be modified to best relate to class objectives.

Conclusion

The use of TED.com in the language classroom introduces students not only to global issues, but also to concepts of global education (Cates, 1990; 1985). Students discover world problems and, through

discussion, are able to personalize themes and imagine solutions. Further, the *TED Lite* approach features student-led interaction about global issues in a form that could not be more current (since TED Talks are updated weekly).

Educators and students must find a way to teach each other about how the world really works. Today's students don't need to open their minds to receive a mass of information so much as they need to train and condition their minds to have the dexterity to encounter the new global issues they will have to face during their lifetime. As new concerns continue to emerge, the TED stage will continue to host the world's greatest thinkers, chronicling humanity's journey.

TED Lite brings these ideas to the classroom, and provides many opportunities for students to refine their communication and thinking skills. Within this approach, learners are given student autonomy, practice in critical thinking, and exposure to global issues and current events. I hope that this lesson idea can help you to make the invaluable resource of TED.com accessible and meaningful for your students.

In addition to the *TED Lite* activity described here, my colleagues and I have also developed further TED lessons such as *Instant TED* (practice developing good questions), *TED Video Circles* (a student-led project-based lesson), *TED Critical* (critiquing TED speakers and challenging their message), and *TED Video Circles +* (a cooperative-learning based research project).

For more information on *TED Lite*, please contact me at the e-mail given. For additional ideas and resources on using TED.com, see *Blended learning* (Fogal, Graham, and Lavigne, in press). A talk on *TED Lite* will be featured at the 2014 TESOL Convention in Portland, Oregon.

Notes

¹ Who, what, when, where, why, and how

² A communication technique that requires the listener to re-state or paraphrase what the speaker has said in order to confirm what they have heard.

References

- Cates, K. (1990) Teaching for a Better World. *The Language Teacher*.
- Kniep, W. M. (1985). A critical review of the short history of global education. New York: *Global Perspectives in Education*.
- Seitz, John L., and Kristen A. Hite. (2012) *Global Issues: An Introduction*.
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Fogal, G., Graham, F. & Lavigne, A. (in press). Blended learning: An evolving praxis. *TESOL Journal*.

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Global Issues: TED Categories

- *A Greener Future* (120 talks):
www.ted.com/themes/a_greener_future.html
- *Global Issues* (366 talks)
www.ted.com/topics/global+issues
- *Environment* (74 talks):
www.ted.com/topics/environment
- *Energy* (37 talks):
www.ted.com/topics/energy
- Other TED Categories: *activism, agriculture, climate change, consumerism, disease, gender, government, health, military, philanthropy, plastic, pollution, oceans, religion, social change, technology, trafficking, war and more!*

Recommended TED Video Talks

1. John Hardy: *My green school dream*
2. Yann Arthus-Bertrand: *Fragile Earth*
3. J. Klein: *Photos that changed the world*
4. Nic Marks: *The happy planet index*
5. Dave Meslin: *The antidote to apathy*
6. Dyan deNapoli: *The great penguin rescue*
7. H. Rosling: *Stats that reshape your worldview*
8. C. Adichie: *The danger of a single story*
9. Jamie Oliver: *Teach every child about food*
10. Sheryl Sandberg: *Why we have too few women leaders*
11. S. Khan: *Let's use video to reinvent education*
12. A. Svitak: *What adults can learn from kids*
13. Ken Robinson: *Schools kill creativity*
14. Brené Brown: *The power of vulnerability*
15. Barry Schwartz: *The paradox of choice*
16. Hyeonseo Lee: *My escape from North Korea*
17. Dan Pallotta: *The way we think about charity is dead wrong*
18. Bono: *The good news on poverty (Yes, there's good news!)*