Learning to Create Sustainable Change
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Introduction

Before you read this article, please think about your students' educational experiences and answer the following questions.

1. Do your students learn about real-world problems at school?
2. Do your students research and discuss to find educated, multifaceted approaches to tackle problems in a realistic manner based on a global perspective?
3. Do your students then implement these solutions to create sustainable change?

If you answered 'No' to any of these questions, please keep reading. When students learn about problems and even go so far as to outline realistic solutions, how useful will their education be if they never learn to implement a plan? Ultimately, teachers are responsible for producing global citizens. One of the best things about a language classroom is that, with appropriate scaffolding, students can learn a language while doing almost anything. The rest of this article will introduce a seven-step framework, presented at the JALT 2011 conference, to enable your students to take the initiative in identifying, understanding, and solving problems in a realistic and sustainable manner while learning a language.

A Framework Overview

Step 1 - Choose a problem:
Have students form groups of 4. Ask them to think of a problem that they want to solve. For example, a group of my students were concerned that not all children in Asia are able to go to school.

Step 2 - Map the sources of the problem:
Have each group research and create a mind map (Illumine Training, n.d). Each branch of the map should list a source of the problem with examples. Addressing the sources of a problem is essential for creating sustainable change. It is important for students to be able to identify them at this stage. To help struggling groups identify sources of problems, ask pointed questions, such as "Why?" Once they complete their mind map, it's recommended to have them focus on one source of the problem, within a limited area. This will make subsequent tasks less overwhelming and greatly improve the chances for success.

The following, for example, is part of a possible mind-map that students might create on the topic of children's education in Vietnam:

Sample Mind Map (extract)

1. Education levels amongst ethnic minority children in Vietnam are very low.
   (a) Children spend their time supporting their families, instead of going to school.
      i. They often fetch water.
         1. The seasonal rivers often run dry and they have to go farther and farther to get water.
         2. The water is not always potable.

Step 3 - Goal setting:
Introduce SMART goals. A SMART goal is

S pecific
M easurable
A ttainable
R ealistic / **R** elevant
T ime oriented
(Amnesty International, 2008:7)

An example of a SMART goal my students set is to organize charity events in Japan over the next four months to raise 15,000 yen. This money will be used to build one well at an elementary school in rural Vietnam, allowing children to attend school and to support their families. Encourage students to make many SMART sub-goals as well. To meet their goals, ask students to contribute their time, energy and ideas. This will test their ingenuity and give them experience planning and implementing a business action plan. By gathering money and/or supplies from the community, the students become representatives of all those who contribute. It is a fun way for students to build a stronger local community.

Step 4 - Team building:
Students should ask friends and community members to join them. Student leaders should make sure everyone shares a common vision. This will keep the group working together and prevent possible disagreements. A written goal, displayed publicly on posters or a blog, may be a convenient method to facilitate clear communication.

Step 5 - Collaborate with others:
Encourage your students to work with other groups. They are probably not the only ones who want to improve the situation. For example, my students contacted the *Ethnic Minorities Outreach* NPO. This group has a Japan chapter that organizes the construction of wells at schools and works with local priests and social workers in rural Vietnam to distribute aid directly to those in need.

Step 6 - Take action:
Have students educate others and work to change the sources of the problems chosen in Step 1. For example, a group of my students collected unwanted used goods and sold them at local festivals. They held charity concerts and a charity soccer tournament. They also made curry rice to sell to hungry soccer players at the tournament. At each event, they educated participants about their project. As a result, they earned 180,000 yen ($2,300) in about two months. Of that, they used 45,000 yen ($570) to build three wells, providing clean and reliable water to approximately 300 Vietnamese families. The students decided to use the rest for aid following severe floods in Vietnam. This activity inspired ten students to pay their own way to Vietnam to distribute the aid they provided as part of an *Ethnic Minorities Outreach* NPO trip. Two years later, six of these students are planning a return trip to Vietnam. This is no longer part of a class. They are recruiting younger students and training them in how to create sustainable change as a club activity. They are earning money faster than before and continue to study the challenges facing Vietnam to determine how to best use the money they raise. For anyone interested, I will be sharing more about this at the GILE SIG forum at this fall's JALT 2012 conference in Hamamatsu.

Step 7 - Following up:
Have students report progress and celebrate their successes. To give these activities a language-learning focus, assign presentations after each step and a written portfolio to document their efforts. Collaborating with an English-speaking group, through the use of a blog, may also be a possibility worth investigating.

Embedding language learning tasks
There are many ways to implement this general framework. I've experimented quite a lot and found that each time it generates excellent language-learning opportunities. It leads groups of students to independently select real-world issues, learn about them, and teach each other using English. It harnesses students' intrinsic motivation and introduces vocabulary relevant to the topics that they are passionate about. Student-centered, task-based learning activities provide opportunities for extensive informal language practice. With multiple groups studying different global issues, information gaps are naturally created. This is ideal for cooperative learning and peer teaching within a communicative language class. The content knowledge that students generate continually grows and is perfect for formal speeches to balance the types of language learned.

Conclusion
The framework introduced here allows students to improve their language abilities in an enjoyable way. In addition, students develop their abilities to learn autonomously, to work as part of a team, to create and carry out a plan of action, and to confidently speak in public. These are all necessary abilities for your students to become not only global citizens, but also leaders in the global community. If you have any questions or want to know more, please don't hesitate to contact me.

This article is based on a presentation given by the author at the 2011 JALT international conference in Tokyo, Japan.

References
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Amnesty International
<www.amnesty-usa.org>

The year 2011 marked the 50th anniversary of *Amnesty International*. Scan their website, check out their teaching materials or try teaching your students the dramatic story of how British lawyer Peter Benenson began AI way back in 1961.