

Growth and Learning through Global Issue Poster Presentations

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Introduction

After a year of having my very low-level, often demotivated English-as-a-foreign-language (L2) students present posters on textbook topics such as food, celebrations, jobs or music, I decided to move towards a more global issues focus in my classroom language projects. This was largely a result of discovering that many students were studying social and global issues in their Japanese (L1) seminar courses, and that a significant number were participating in volunteer projects or experiential learning activities both on campus and during fieldwork trips overseas. I hoped that a global issues focus might motivate my students in their language learning by helping them to connect their English classes with their wider university learning. After talking with Japanese professors, I found out more about the L1 seminar topics our students were studying and how I could encourage students to present their fieldwork experiences to their classmates and to engage more deeply with world issues while communicating in English.

A global education approach to foreign language teaching allows students to develop communication skills while working together on tasks such as poster presentations on social and environmental issues. Such content-based projects actively encourage students to acquire the language, skills and knowledge necessary to communicate their ideas and opinions about global issues, to think critically, and so develop as world citizens (Cates, 1990; Nakamura, 2002). This article reports on a successful L2 poster project about non-profit organisations (NPOs), volunteer fieldwork and global/environmental problems.



Poster

Global
Issue #1

Poster

Global
Issue #2



Context for my students' English learning

- 1st - 3rd year Japanese university students.
- 15-week, 4 skills course, 90-minute class/week.
- Text: *Impact Issues* (four skills, global issues).
- Poster projects at the end of the semester.
- Assessment: self-evaluations and reflections, peer assessment, teacher assessment.
- L1 seminars taught by Japanese professors: *globalisation and civil society, Fairtrade politics, cultural anthropology and East Africa, international volunteer fieldwork, NPOs.*

Foreign Language Poster Presentations

L2 poster projects are widely recognised as a useful means for developing learners' language skills through a series of linked communicative tasks (Bayne, 2005; Jost, 2005). The benefits of poster presentations are diverse. Firstly, the project is a *student-centred task* where group members take responsibility and control of the learning process, and individualise their final product. Secondly, there are many opportunities for *recycling* language and content from the textbook, L1 seminar topics and fieldwork experiences. Next, *task repetition* in poster carousels enhances *oral fluency* development. Finally, the open-ended outcome is suitable for *mixed level* classes. Students present their topic information on a large format poster (hand-drawn or computer-designed), which includes keywords and pictures about a chosen topic. The poster itself provides a speaking prompt for students' oral presentations and a visual aid for the audience.

After some classroom discussion, I clarified the following learning goals and outcomes for a global issues poster presentation:

- To develop multiple language skills (authentic speaking and listening, reading and research, and speech writing);
- To encourage collaboration and learner autonomy through task-based group work;
- To increase learners' world knowledge;
- To develop critical thinking and deeper engagement with global issues content;
- To lead students towards active world citizenship.

A global issues focus encourages young adults to expand their world knowledge, increase their critical thinking and move towards active world citizenship (Cates, 1990). During this poster project, sophomore students taught their peers about real fieldwork experiences and English communication opportunities with NPOs in India, Zanzibar, and Mexico. The classroom became a collaborative learning environment, where both teacher and students became co-learners.

My freshmen classes completed their poster presentations about a global or local issue. Their self-selected topics included 'Recycling in Japan', 'Endangered animals', 'Rude behaviour in Japan' and 'Global-warming solutions'. More recently, senior classes prepared posters on topics such as 'Cross-

cultural learning and reflections’ and ‘Immigrants in Japan’ stemming from their experiences studying abroad or working with foreigners in Japan. All classes were required to carry out Internet research in pairs, write a speech, design a poster and deliver an oral presentation. The projects made up 20% of their final grade.

A Task-based Lesson Cycle

I always provide large amounts of scaffolding for each stage of this project so the target task (an oral presentation) is achievable. The short, linked skills tasks below provide students with multiple opportunities for authentic communication (Ellis, 2006) leading to the poster construction.

1. Pre-task phase activities

In pairs or groups, the class first brainstorms relevant vocabulary and generates ideas about the various world issues that we covered in a textbook unit on global warming. Then, I lead the students into a *classroom survey* about volunteer work and organisations to personalize the topic and to activate schemata, review vocabulary and ideas. Later, students complete a *matching task-sheet* where they discuss a list of 8 well-known NPO logos, read short descriptions about these NPOs, then match each organisation with a global or social problem. I intentionally choose and prepare information about NPOs (*Greenpeace, Fairtrade, Stop Child Labour, Amnesty International*) that are related to the fieldwork and world issues that students have discussed or encountered in their Japanese seminar classes. Finally, poster groups are assigned, students choose their topics (ideally from the list above), then research information from the bilingual websites which I provide.

2. Task phase and task performance

I distribute a handout on *poster presentation guidelines* that has the assessment criteria and deadlines, plus a *worksheet* with target questions to

help learners focus their research. Each group has one week to gather material on their NPO topic, and share homework tasks. During this phase, learners organize and prioritise their information and pictures, then create a poster. I usually allow 2 classes for poster-making, speech writing and rehearsal. Students are expected to do some of this work outside the classroom.

On presentation day, there are a number of options for oral presentations. Over the course of a year, I try to vary the format to keep the task interesting and challenging for the class. Students can (1) present to other small groups at their tables, or (2) present in front of the class, or (3) present in a *poster carousel* format where concurrent presentations take place. Carousels are an excellent use of class time because everyone is either presenting or an audience member; speakers present several times with improvements in fluency, and listeners hear a number of interesting talks by their classmates. Just before the *task performance* stage, I have the class review ‘presentation language’ (Shrosbree, 2010), rehearse their speeches with posters and cue cards, and explain audience listening tasks. Sometimes I prepare note-taking tables for completion, or question prompts on paper strips for listeners, depending on the class level and the goals. Such tasks encourage active listening and authentic interaction between speaker and interlocutor, and can be part of students’ assessment.

3. Post task and assessment

Poster presentations offer students a fair means of assessing their language skills and work done. When scheduled at the end of a cycle (completing a textbook unit, at midpoint or the end of a term), student posters sessions can provide summative evaluation of work done, content learnt and language skills acquired. Students are able to produce their best performance after they’ve had time and support to prepare information, practise skills, and give repeat presentations. In the carousel sessions, I would evaluate learners’ final performances. Both teacher

Excerpt of Classroom Survey about Volunteering and Fieldwork:

QUESTIONS	MY ANSWERS	MY CLASSMATE'S ANSWERS
1. Name one or more volunteer or charity organizations that you know something about.		
2. What global problems are these organizations involved with?		
3. Have you ever done Volunteer Work or Field Work ? Where? What kind of work?		

and peers can observe the best performance, then offer comments and feedback to inform the student's final grade for the presentations. Features of both fluency and accuracy can be evaluated using a transparent speaking rubric, along with a grade for group participation/effort and for goal achievement.

I usually have my class write self-evaluations and peer comment slips to encourage reflection about the task process, performance and future improvements. Students can submit written reports, vote on best posters, or answer a survey on their enjoyment of global issue topics and poster tasks.

Student Feedback from Presentation Surveys

At the end of each semester, I ask students to complete an informal questionnaire about their poster projects (adapted from Nakamura, 2002). The aim is to get learners to reflect on and notice how and whether these poster sessions were useful for their language learning, and to gather feedback to inform future classroom assessment tasks. Students are also asked to reflect and comment specifically on the *carousel* activity. Learner responses to this global issues poster project have been positive overall:

- *I feel more confident about speaking in front of the class...keywords helped me remember my ideas.*
- *Poster project was fun and benefited me because I could learn information on my topic.*
- *I could learn about world's problem and I can maybe join NPO now.*

- *I could organise my ideas in my head each time better.*
- *I tried to speak faster each time, I tried to relax and just say my ideas...not care the mistakes.*
- *I felt more relaxed each time I gave my speech.*
- *I could remember almost information the final time. I could just look at the audience and speak.*

Learners enjoyed aspects of the poster project such as conducting research, planning information, group work and developing confidence about speaking to an audience. More than half felt more confident about expressing their opinions on world issues. They shared personally transformative experiences and improvements in English proficiency from their fieldwork abroad. A few were motivated to continue their research in their Japanese seminar classes, and think more deeply than before about global issues and on-campus volunteer activities available to them. A few senior students are actively seeking employment with international NPOs. Undoubtedly, this is likely a result of the class work carried out in their Japanese seminars, but hopefully such students have also benefited from having the opportunities to express themselves freely in English about global issues and to work collaboratively on related projects in their English classes, too.

For new foreign teachers to Japan, there is a wealth of useful research and classroom resources with a global education focus (GILE; Hinkelman et al, 2000; Hosack, 2011; Spiri, 2002, 2010).

Volunteer Organizations (NPO)		A: Global Problems	B: Possible Solutions
	1. World Wildlife Fund	b) Many animal, birds and plant species are dying out because humans are killing them, or destroying the animals' natural environment.	f) We should... ▪ protect endangered species ▪ not eat rare fish or meat...
	2. Stop Child Labour	??	d) Help young children go to school so they don't have to do dangerous work.
	3. Fairtrade Foundation	??	??

1. World Wildlife Fund is an international conservation organization, which raises funds for many conservation groups. They work towards protecting endangered animals and their environments. Websites: <www.worldwildlife.org> <www.panda.org>

Conclusion

The inclusion of global issue topics in several of my university EFL classes actively encourages students to acquire the target language skills and knowledge necessary to communicate their ideas and opinions about social issues, to think critically and so develop as world citizens. A global education approach encompasses not just content, but also skills and attitudes that lead to taking action about social and global problems. English language teachers can give their students opportunities to develop L2 communication skills and world knowledge through task-based activities such as poster presentations or projects. Although speaking fluency is a significant goal, poster presentations also offer rich opportunities for development of the four skills while learners of all levels participate in task-based group work.

When scheduled appropriately in a language syllabus, poster presentations can become a highlight in the classroom learning community. Poster topics which complement or reflect content that students are studying in other courses can engage and motivate them to explore subjects more deeply. Inter-departmental communication and collaboration between foreign guest lecturers and Japanese content professors can inform the focus of English classes to some extent, and be clearly beneficial to students who attend both L1 and L2 courses. When students have opportunities to draw on their extra-curricular experiences and to choose their own topics, they are able to personalize the learning process and final product. With transparent performance criteria, the oral presentation is a tangible achievement goal in which students can showcase their linguistic, creative and academic skills. In all these ways poster presentations about global issues are an effective means for language learners to develop their language fluency. Moreover, they enhance students' ability to fluently engage with relevant social issues as active world citizens contributing to their own self-realization and to the progress and improvement of the society they live in.

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