



Tips for Teachers

Teaching Global Issues in the English Language Class

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Many language teachers find it challenging to smoothly integrate a principled approach to language instruction with presentation of stimulating content. We have found that using global issues helps us manage this integration and results in several other benefits as well. What follows is our rationale for using global issues in language classes along with some suggestions about materials and activities that have worked well for us.

Why Do We Use Global Issues in Our Language Classes?

First, using global issues provides meaningful content within which language teaching can take place. Research shows that effective content-based instruction can lead to enhanced linguistic growth and a transfer of knowledge and skills to other contexts. Second, exploring global issues provides a context for integrating all four language skills. Third, global issues lend themselves to creation of effective student-centered activities such as role-plays, simulations, surveys, debates, and group projects. Fourth, lessons on global issues also create opportunities to bring the community into the classroom or take students into the community. These opportunities include inviting guest speakers, visiting non-profit organizations, taking other field trips, and doing community service projects. Fifth, discussion and exploration of global issues help students learn to see and respect different points of view on important issues, whether they are individual, cultural, or national perspectives. This also helps students reflect on their own beliefs. Finally, many ESL educators believe that they have a responsibility to promote peace, justice, and a concern for the world's problems among our students.

What Are Some Global Issues That Are Appropriate for Language Learners?

In broad terms, environmental, economic, political, and social issues can all work well. Environmental issues include global warming, deforestation, and endangered species. Economic issues range from poverty to globalization and fair trade. Political issues such as war, peace, conscription of child soldiers, and use of landmines make good topics for class studies, as do social issues such as AIDS and other diseases, human trafficking, and access to water as a human right. These are just a few of the many issues that could be used. Teachers must choose issues that fit the setting, institution, and students that they are working with.

Where Can We Find Suitable Materials on Global Issues?

Textbooks

There are quite a few textbooks on the market that focus on global issues, but relatively few of them are written for English language learners. Some Japanese publishers are beginning to address this need. These two texts are written for ESL students at the intermediate level or above.

- * Grohe, W., & Root, C. (1996). *Speaking globally*. Prentice Hall Regents.
- * Day, R., & Yamanaka, J. (1998). *Impact issues*. Lingual House/Longman.

Online “Books”

These resources have enough breadth and depth to provide sustained content for a full semester of study. While they are not books per se, they are as contentful as books.

- * Online publications by the Office of English Language Programs, an entity within the U.S. Department of State, have an intended EFL audience, but we have used some of these materials in ESL settings as well. These are called *Forum Electronic Journals*, and they cover topics such as civic education, environmental education, peace education, business ethics, gene research, cloning, biotechnology, crop engineering, and drugs for the future. Each topic has 10 chapters. Some of the authors of these materials are experts in the field of sustained content in English language classes. The website address is www.exchanges.state.gov/forum/journal.
- * The United States Institute of Peace also has a Teaching Guide on Peace Education for English Language Learners. This guide was the brainchild of two Peace Corps volunteers and addresses conflict resolution in the classroom or

workplace. You can find these materials at www.usip.org/class/guides/conflict.html.

Online Resources for Educators

Unlike the two sites shown above, the following sites are especially aimed at educators. They all have a wealth of resources, including teaching activities, materials, and curricula. The notes below highlight a unique feature of each site.

- * The Educators for Social Responsibility website has an online teaching center with a link to world maps and graphics. These give information on economics, education, energy, health and other topics. Visit www.esrnational.org.
- * The American Forum has a curriculum and lesson plans on global issues, including 32 activities under the topic Global Teaching Tips at www.globaled.org/curriculum3.html.
- * The World Affairs Council Web site has a guide on understanding the Muslim world and resources about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The address for their site is www.world-affairs.org/classroom.html.
- * Facing the Future: People and Planet has several reasonably priced books on global issues. Activities to accompany the book are available at www.teacherscorner.org.
- * Wide Angle is a PBS site with lesson plans that accompany its documentaries and Web episodes on global issues. Visit www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/classroom.
- * Global Eye News is an online resource connected with the magazine of the same name. It covers issues such as sustainability and tourism and includes case studies. The address is www.globaleye.org.uk/archive/index/html.

ESL and EFL Professional Organizations

There are resources in the professional community of English as a second or foreign language teachers.

- * Caucus for Social Responsibility in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Visit www2.tesol.orgcommunities/tsr/.
- * Global Issues in Language Education, a special interest group (SIG) in the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). Their website is at www.jalt.org/global/sig/. Kip Cates, a leader in the use of global issues in EFL

contexts edits the newsletter of this SIG called *Global Issues in Language Education*.

- * Global Issues SIG in the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). Look for their website at www.iatefl-gisg.org/.

The greatest source of materials on global issues is probably the hundreds of non-governmental organizations whose work directly relates to such issues. Frequently, high quality materials, from lesson plans to videotapes, are available free to educators. Individual teachers are in the best position to assess whether materials from a particular organization are readable or otherwise appropriate for their particular ESL/EFL audience. Some organizations have websites or teaching materials that are intended for young learners but may also appeal to adult language learners. Other organizations produce materials that are intended for mainstream students, but the topical content makes them especially appropriate for English language learners. An example in this vein is the magazine *Refugees* and related materials produced by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. Other such examples are mentioned in specific activities below.

What Are Some Examples of Language Class Projects Using Global Issues?

Below are five examples of activities that we have used with global issues in our classes. All of them could be adapted for different topics or levels of learners. They range from a one-day activity to a four-day series of lessons.

Example 1: Interpreting and Explaining Statistical Information

Topic: Education of girls around the world

Level: Low intermediate

Culmination: Information gap

Process

1. Teacher gives students some background information on the plight of girls' education in some developing countries. (Information is available at the Girls Global Education Fund website at www.ggef.org/status.html.)
2. Teacher gives each pair of students different statistical information from the website.
3. Students must create a graphic display of their statistical information.
4. Teacher provides colored pens and encourages students to be creative.

5. Teacher helps students with the language they need to use in explaining percentages, fractions, and trends. Students practice.
6. Students circulate with their partner to meet other pairs and exchange information.

Example 2: Learning About NGOs

Topic: NGOs
 Level: High intermediate
 Culmination: Poster presentation

Process

1. Students work in small groups.
2. Each group chooses an NGO. (An extensive list of NGOs can be found at www.docs.lib.duke.edu/igo/guides/ngo.)
3. Students read background information online.
4. They take notes and report to their group in the next class.
5. As a group, they make a poster with key information and pictures.
6. They practice explaining their information to others.
7. Finally, they present the information to the class.

Example 3: Exploring Various Aspects of a Single Issue

Topic: Rainforests
 Level: Low intermediate
 Culmination: PowerPoint presentations

Process

1. Students work in small groups.
2. Teacher assigns each group one section from the Rainforest Action Network website: www.ran.org/info_center/teacherstudent.html.
3. Students study their information together.
4. Teachers plan a workshop to teach essential principles of PowerPoint design.
5. Students prepare their presentations as a group.
6. Students share their presentations with the class.

Example 4: Understanding Different Points of View

Topic: Globalization and fair trade

Level: Advanced

Culmination: Class debate

Process

1. Teacher divides the class into two groups.
2. Teacher gives each group information from one point of view. For example, on this topic, one group reads ten benefits of the World Trade Organization (WTO) from www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/10ben_e/10b00_e.htm. The other group reads ten reasons to oppose the WTO as presented by the Global Exchange Organization at www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/rulemakers/topTenReasons.html.
3. Students work together to understand the point of view presented in their information.
4. Teacher outlines process for a debate appropriate to the linguistic level of the students.
5. The class holds the debate.

Example 5: Thinking Locally and Globally

Topic: Homelessness

Level: High intermediate or advanced

Culmination: Mini research project

Process

1. Using information from local sources, give a mini lecture on homelessness in the community where your school is located.
2. Students discuss opinion statements about homelessness and related issues.
3. Students read an article on myths about homelessness.
4. Students check their opinions against the articles they have read.
5. Students visit the website for the National Homeless Organization and read the profile of a homeless person. The address is www.nationalhomeless.org.
6. Students retell the story that they read to several classmates.

7. Students research homelessness and programs serving the homeless in their respective countries.
8. Students share what they have learned with their classmates.
9. As a class, discuss whether opinions and attitudes have changed as a result of this study and brainstorm a list of ways to address homelessness.

Besides classroom activities, students can also learn about global issues by becoming involved in activities at the school or community level. For example, our university holds student symposiums on global citizenship twice a year bringing together students, faculty, and citizens from the community. Many high schools and universities have student clubs, such as Model UN and Amnesty International, which focus on global issues. There are also numerous websites designed to link students in one country with students in other countries. Such linkages help students connect with people in other places as a first step toward understanding them better and respecting them more.

About the Authors

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