Bridging Global Issues and the Japanese University Student

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Abstract

English has rapidly become the global lingua franca. Through acquiring it, students can gain access to cultural exchanges with people around the world. This burgeoning global community presents an opportunity for dynamic understanding of worldwide issues and provides a chance to cooperatively seek solutions for them. One challenge facing teachers in Japan has been to discover new ways to introduce global issues into university classrooms. In recent years, however, TED.com has been creating authentic videos by leaders in their respective fields on a wide range of timely themes. These videos can be used in new and interesting ways to increase awareness while improving language skills of Japanese university students. The authors present a variety of ways in which TED.com can be used as a learning tool to assist students in ultimately becoming more cooperative, globally-minded citizens.

1 Introduction

Through globalization and the increasingly interdependent nature of our world, the need for cooperation and heightened international awareness has never been greater. The rapid expansion of English languages, along with technological advancements, have allowed humans to connect with unprecedented convenience and ease. Now is the time for educational institutions to deviate from antiquated models borne in industrialization and instead, prepare students for the changes that are well underway. How do teachers provide students with the tools they need

to succeed in their future? How do teachers condition minds to have the flexibility and problem-solving skills to be ready to encounter that which cannot be prepared for? In this paper, the authors elaborate on effective modes of instruction using TED Talks to introduce global issues into the classroom, which ultimately leads to activities that promote an increased interdependence between the students. By introducing global issues through the medium of English, teachers not only help students to acquire a lingua franca, but also furnish them with the knowledge needed to engage in discussion concerning world problems. Through fostering creative and cooperative interaction in the classroom, students become more prepared to tackle the pressing issues collectively faced at present and into the future together.

2 Background

As nations become more interdependent, some of the challenges they face must also be solved multilaterally. Inextricably linked with global issues is the economic model of globalization, in which countries exchange goods and depend on one another to maintain their standards of living. Global education seeks to address the need in English language teaching to foster a more global mindset in students and render more responsible and ethical global citizens and caretakers.

2.1 Global Education

With each passing year, the lives of people become more linked with others around the world. This results in a sense of connectivity that the world has not known before modern technology and energy sources afforded this lifestyle. Global education enlists educators to connect their lessons to the world outside their classrooms. "Educators have a responsibility to help students develop not just in subject area, but as active citizens of their school, country, and of the world. They should grow into people who are willing to address problems and make appropriate changes" (McCafferty, Jacobs, & Dasilva Iddings, 2006: 17). Once students have begun to acquire English, their perspective widens to begin thinking about the world at large, a world in which unfortunately continues to suffer from war, poverty, division, human-made climate disruptions, and pollution. The primary content of many classrooms today comes out of an educational

model that was developed around the time of the industrial revolution (May, 2011). This model has not evolved at a rapid enough pace to adequately prepare today's students to best contribute to a sustainable future. For these reasons, the need for cooperation within global education could not be more urgent. Consequently, teachers have a responsibility to contribute to a better world by facilitating students' acquisition of the global lingua franca, but also by furnishing them with skills necessary to solve problems, and further peace, development, and a healthier planet.

2.2 Social change throughout the world

In the 1950's and 60's, human development was inextricably linked with economic development. Over time, some of the social changes that occurred with economic growth were realized to be undesirable. Thus, the United Nations now sees the purpose of development as the creation of an environment in which people can lead long, healthy, and creative lives (United Nations, 2004). If educators understand their role in creating socially responsible world citizens, today's students become enabled to examine, attempt to understand and explore solutions to global issues within the classroom (Cates, 1990). The problems that future generations will face have yet to be completely defined. As such, today's learners have the right to know about the destructive things that humans are doing to life on earth in order to begin formulating how they might pursue a new course. For example, human beings must understand how to provide basic needs to a rapidly expanding population given finite resources as well as continue to develop intellectually, morally, and spiritually towards a sustainable future. This exciting and challenging state of affairs makes it essential for educators to equip their students with critical thinking skills for making informed choices and preventing irreversible destruction while also working together towards a shared future.

3 Cooperative learning

As language learning slowly shifted away from more traditional instructional methods such as audio-lingual and grammar translation, the focus fell on the collaborative nature of the process instead. Language came to be viewed more fundamentally as a vehicle for communicating (information) with others (Larsen-

Freeman, 2000) and communicative language teaching (CLT) was employed to address this concept of language learning as a cooperative act. Building on Vygotsky's (1986) theory of knowledge as a social construct and Deutsch's (1949, 2006) views of social interdependence, CLT urged proponents to find ways for students to work together to accomplish (language) activities which would ultimately improve their oral abilities and move them away from more competitive and individualistic forms of education. Indeed, within a Japanese culture that is frequently seen as cooperative and group oriented (Davies and Ikeno, 2002), cooperative learning activities and methods, on the surface, appear to be suited for the Japanese EFL learner. Yet, the typical classroom environment of secondary language classrooms throughout Japan appears to still be dominated by teacher-centered classes (Sakui, 2004). Thus, in Japanese university classrooms, students gradually need to be brought into a cooperative learning experience.

Cooperative learning is an extremely rich area of research in the education field. Johnson and Johnson's (1989, 2003) exhaustive meta-analysis on cooperative learning methods and research reveals a plethora of benefits derived from cooperative learning situations, especially when contrasted with competitive and individualistic ones. They group these into three clear categories—effort to achieve, quality of relationships, and psychological health—listing increases in achievement and engagement in learning, as well as gains in motivation and higher level reasoning strategies, among the many advantages to be achieved (n.d.). With the vast amount of existing research and theory, the definition and elements of cooperative learning vary. Two core aspects, however, seem to hinge on positive interdependence and individual accountability (McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva Iddings, 2006: 4–5). Clearly overlapping, they emphasize the goals and outcomes of the group as intertwined with those of each individual member—"sink or swim together"—and the responsibility to contribute to the overall knowledge base of the others and thus for the successful completion of a task.

> "Cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goals. Within cooperative situations, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to

maximize their own and each other's learning." (Johnson and Johnson, n.d.)

Kagan and Kagan (1994) add two additional principles—equal participation and simultaneous interaction—and further caution that a lack of structure or roles provided for a task results in group work as opposed to cooperative learning. Equal participation ensures that students learn material and language skills through interacting with the content and their fellow group members in a reasonably equal manner and that no one dominates or remains quiet. Simultaneous interaction demands less focus on the teacher as the activity/class leader with student autonomy and participation being maximized. Employed properly, "cooperative learning groups...make each member a stronger individual in his or her right... so that they can subsequently perform higher as individuals" (Johnson and Johnson, n.d).

4 Combining cooperative learning and global education

Global education seeks to address topics such as global justice, peace, sustainability and human rights. Global education considers a wide range of methodological approaches such as learner-centered, participatory, experience-based and partnership-based as well as others. Cooperative learning and global issues both fit under the umbrella of 'global education' in that preparing students for the problems of tomorrow does not rely solely on what students learn, but also on how they learn it and an ability to adapt to constant change. According to Cates, "this involves a shift from passive to active learning, from teacher- to student-centered classes, and from the study of language as a school subject to the study of language for the purpose of communicating with and about the world" (2002). Within global education, the teacher's role is often that of a facilitator, rather than a content provider. Learner independence and autonomy creates a space for differing perspectives, instilling students with the personal accountability and responsibility that is necessary for cooperation.

5 TED (Technology, Education & Design)

In 1984, TED was born when Richard Saul Wurman began to observe the

powerful possibilities of three forces; technology, education and design *(History of TED, 2006)*. The first TED included a demo of the e-book as well as the compact disk and a demonstration by Benoit Mandelbrot on how to map coastlines. It was not until six years later that the TED Conference, held in Monterrey, California, began to attract an increasing and influential audience from a wide range of disciplines. Each year at these conferences, scientists, business leaders, motivational speakers and philanthropists gave innovative talks to an invitation-only audience. One year later, media entrepreneur Chris Anderson met with Wurman to discuss the future of the TED Conference, and shortly after, Sapling Foundation, Anderson's non-profit organization, acquired TED and Anderson became its curator. Anderson utilized an inspired format, a wide range of content and was committed to seeking out and finding some of the most interesting people on earth to communicate their ideas to a wider audience. In the years 2001–2006 TED Global took the message of TED to locations throughout the world and created an audio and video podcast series, followed by TED Talks whose content is released free online and translated into over 100 languages.

5.1 TED Lite and Listening: Introducing global issues through TED

Students, and people in general, have limited motivation when being lectured about something that they did not choose (Ames and Ames, 1990). Luckily, over the course of some years, TED.com has grown to accumulate thousands of talks about a variety of topics from which students can choose a topic that appeals to them. By presenting on an interesting topic and then asking peers to personalize and expand upon these themes, students can create thought-provoking opportunities from which all can learn.

As a way to introduce TED.com and its utility, as well as promote student autonomy within the themes of global issues, the authors employ an activity called TED Lite (Fogal, Graham & Lavigne, 2014). Students choose a video from TED.com that interests them, present the video to classroom peers along with language exercises, and facilitate a discussion. These activities allow for autonomous learning, build knowledge about world problems, their causes, and possible solutions, and help them to acquire both language and critical thinking skills. As part of this activity, students prepare a written report consisting of a one-paragraph summary, a one-paragraph impression, new vocabulary terms, and at

least three discussion questions. The whole process of TED Lite—from viewing the TED video to posing the discussion questions—is a process of identifying the speaker's message and transforming it into a thematic analysis of a particular cultural, societal, or global topic *(see Lavigne, A. G. (2014) for lesson mechanics and further details)*.

5.1.2 TED Listening

TED Talks at TED.com can also be utilized as authentic listening tasks to prepare students for extended discussions and interactive activities. Unlike TED Lite, students are assigned a TED Talk by their instructor approximately one week before the discussion, given a paper task with pre-assigned vocabulary and space to add vocabulary words that are unfamiliar to them. This paper task includes critical thinking questions assigned by the instructor to the students, and similar to TED Lite, space for students to create and include questions of their own. Students then individually listen to the assigned TED Talk in a listening lab. In the listening lab, students are able to listen at their own pace, listen frequently and most importantly, ask their instructor questions about pronunciation, usage and meanings that are difficult to understand. This type of activity requires students to focus on listening to the text for the gist of the talk, and then prepare to discuss their critical thinking questions formulated from the activity. One thing that distinguishes TED Talks from other online video talks is the variety of speakers themselves. Since many speakers are experts in their field of study, students have a unique opportunity to embrace difficult concepts through an interactive activity in a hands-on, practical way. For example, after completing the TED Talk entitled, "The Marshmallow Challenge" students were interested in *doing* the activity in which the talk gets its title. Activities such as this act as a metaphor for ways to solve and address global problems by cooperating with each other, listening to ideas and working together for a desired outcome.

5.2 TED Group Presentations

Literature circles (Furr, 2004) are a consummate cooperative learning activity with proven efficacy in a variety of educational settings. Fogal, Graham, and Lavigne (2014) provide an adaptation of the original formula that has been utilized effectively for more communicative-based exercises revolving around

discussion. Their description of video circles, while providing a rich forum for the exchange of important dialogue between classroom peers among other skills acquired, however, lacks a more specific cooperative component. To accomplish that, the authors of this paper have revisited the original literature circle formula and extracted roles and tasks that create a more cooperative experience, thereby encouraging a feeling of shared responsibility and positive interdependence.

5.2.2 Establishing groups and roles

Students are placed into groups of five members, however, with smaller groupings, roles can be combined. Group members select a video from the talks listed under the topic "Global Issues" on the TED website to share with their classmates. Roles are chosen from among the following choices: summarizer, researcher, word wizard, connector, discussion director, and illustrator. Each member is responsible for developing his/her section in preparation for its contribution towards a final whole group presentation where they share their knowledge with the rest of their classmates. The summarizer provides a concise sketch of the TED talk providing biographical information on the speaker and focusing on the main ideas while avoiding unnecessary details. The researcher identifies the central theme(s) of the video and brings in outside research to expand on the topic making it relevant for the local setting. For example, if the speaker discussed the loss of nature, a Japanese university student may research the loss of natural habitats in Japan over the last 10 years. The word wizard selects words or expressions from the video script and designs a basic vocabulary activity such as cloze or matching to activate students' cognitive efforts in learning the new words or expressions. The word wizard also works with the illustrator to include this vocabulary on the student handout to be passed out prior to the presentation. The illustrator's job is to coordinate the material for the student handout, as well as put together a basic presentation for the OHP that displays the discussion questions and any relevant slides that the researcher wants to show. Finally, the discussion director/connector connects the discussion topic with each student's personal lives, their country or culture, and the world through designing appropriate discussion questions. With these various roles and multiple responsibilities, students can choose roles best suited for their strengths, or conversely, ones they wish to improve.

5.2.3 Preparation for presentations

The students are given roughly a week to complete their individual tasks and then allowed several class meetings to put all the component parts together into a presentation format similar to TED Lite, with each section of the presentation divided among individual group members. They are also encouraged to share their opinions about the discussion questions. The teacher circulates around the room checking student progress, answering questions or resolving any difficulties, and serves as an additional resource. Similar to TED Lite, the ultimate goal of the presentation is for the group to share information with their peers and bridge the content so that it may be made personal and meaningful to each student. Presentations are approximately 15–20 minutes each and take place over an additional day or two. Presenters have classmates break into smaller groups and join them to discuss the questions and provide background knowledge from the research. Finally, all members of the group are asked to complete a self and peer assessment where they can rate and comment on all members of the group.

5.2.4 TED Presentation Summary

The TED Group Presentation is an activity that is wholly student-generated and results in an authentic method of introducing modern, global issues into a classroom's vision. Students work together to gain knowledge and work towards a shared goal, thereby realizing the importance of cooperation. As the students bring their individual perspectives to the entire group, everyone benefits and learns from one another. Finally, they share this knowledge with the rest of the class through active participation in the resulting discussion.

6 Conclusion

The authors have presented a step-by-step process of evolving a classroom from traditional instruction to a classroom where cooperative learning is employed. Having students start with the TED Listening to acclimate them to the website and nature of the content, and then following up with the TED Lite activity, they realize the value of their peers' contributions. The students begin to understand the significance of individual contribution and start to rely on each other for overall success of an activity. They are also introduced

to a current global narrative of inspirational ideas while learning accountability and responsibility towards their peers. TED Group Presentations continues to foster interdependence by having students learn as a group and then represent themselves to the class as a unified body. The group presentation is a chance for classmates to take the final step into cooperative learning by working together to deliver a presentation. Lastly, the group members take their gained knowledge of the topic into the group discussions, serving as surrogate experts to help facilitate the thoughtful discourse that often results from their work. The class transforms from teacher-driven to student-led where the teacher serves merely as a guide, an additional resource, and a support mechanism. As testing requirements grow increasingly competitive, it becomes more difficult for teachers to consider holistic goals of education. While the case has been made for a diverse education during children's formative years, it is equally important that students continue to develop their socialization skills and exercise creativity through adolescence, especially as they consider larger issues that they may be asked to solve upon entering adulthood. Life skills of cooperation, active listening, and autonomous learning are important for success in the modern world. Moreover, curriculum based in global issues will prepare Japanese students for the wider global narrative that English languages unveil, thereby affording them the ability to work towards the resolution of problems that can only be solved through mutual understanding and cooperative contribution.

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APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE TED LITE STUDENT SUBMISSION

Title: Michelle Obama's plea for education
Length: 11:48

Summary:

The first African-American First Lady Michelle Obama, a lawyer and administrator, was brought up in Chicago. She was not rich, but she was raised with all that we need: love, strong values and a belief with a good education and a whole a lot of hard work. In 2009, she made speech at a London girls' school. In this talk, she tells the girl students that not only men but also women are play an important role in the world, and the importance of taking education seriously through her experiences of her life. She thinks that they can close the gap between "the world as it is" and "the world as it should be", and they are women who will build "the world as it should be".

Impression:

I was so impressed and encouraged by this talk and Ms. Obama. I think that the young generation should lead the future world and close the gap between "the world as it is" and "the world as it should be", so it is important for us to take education seriously. By doing so, we can control our destiny, as Ms. Obama said in this talk. As for my family, not only my father but also my mother plays an important role in family. She is always cheerful, energetic, and smart. She is not only a housewife, but also a banker. As a banker, she works hard to achieve results and play an important role in the workplace. I would like to be like her someday. I think we should rethink that women also have a great power in the world, and cooperation with men needs to happen for a good future.

VOCABULARY:

1. **dignity** (N)- doing things or being the kind of person that deserves honor and respect
2. **aspiration** (N)- a goal; something you want to achieve

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What makes a good or bad student? What makes a good or bad teacher? What kind of people are they?
2. Michelle Obama talked about the importance of women to a society. In what ways are women important to the society of Japan?
3. In what parts of the world are women treated as equals and celebrated? In what parts of the world are women treated unfairly and given fewer opportunities? Explain with examples.

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE TED LITE STUDENT HANDOUT

TED: Michelle Obama's plea for education
http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/michelle_obama.html

Vocabulary

dignity	aspiration

1. Recently, the _____ and importance of the Japanese father has diminished.
2. She has _____ to become an interior decorator.

Discussion Questions

1. What makes a good or bad student? What makes a good or bad teacher? What kind of people are they?
2. Michelle Obama talked about the importance of women to a society. In what ways are women important to the society of Japan?
3. In what parts of the world are women treated as equals and celebrated? In what parts of the world are women treated unfairly and given fewer opportunities? Explain with examples.