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 HELP & FAQs

A Global Issues Project for the University Classroom

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This paper introduces a project focusing on global issues intended for college/university students. Research has shown that students are interested in and want to learn about global issues. The writer also suggests that it is important for educators to prepare students for a world facing various global crises. The paper will therefore outline a project that includes study of various countries and global issues to allow students to become more globally aware. The project requires students to develop all their own materials which makes them responsible for their own learning and allows them to develop the project to their full potential.

ここで紹介するプロジェクトは世界のあらゆる事象を議論の対象とした、大学生のためのものです。これにより、学生たちが世界の事柄に興味を持ち、それら学ぶ意欲を持っていることが解かりました。また、このプロジェクトを進めるにおいては、学生達に我々が直面している様々な世界的な問題について紹介しておくことが不可欠です。

ここでは、様々な国や事象について学ぶことにより、学生達に物事を見るより広い視野を持つ機会を与えるといったプロジェクトの概要を述べます。このプロジェクトにおいては、全ての教材は学生達自身が準備し、そうすることによって自ら学ぶという責任感を持たせると共に、彼らが持つ能力を存分に発揮することでプロジェクトは進行します。

Introduction

We face increasing numbers of global crises in the world today. As educators it is our role to prepare our students for life in such a world. We need to respond to our student's interest in such topics as well as be understanding of their fears. To do so does not mean that the educator gives the student their own beliefs about such a world but encourages students to discover more and to be broader minded on such topics. This is especially essential for the language student, who when using a foreign language is likely to be in contact with a person of a different culture, race, or nationality. This article will introduce a project for the university classroom aimed at increasing global awareness of the students to enable them to appreciate rather than criticize cultures other than their own. It is a semester long project which encourages students to be responsible for their own learning and as such allows them to develop this project to their full potential. This paper will include a description of the course curriculum as well as a discussion of the success of the course.

Aim

There are several aims of this project. First and foremost is to increase student's awareness of the world (developed and developing). By increasing their knowledge of the world's people they come to understand cultural differences and appreciate situations different to their own. Students consider that others may think or act according to their culture. This improves student's ability to deal with people from other cultures.

Secondary aims include improving English ability, improving learning skills, and learning about various global issues. Firstly the English aims include:

- a. to learn in English,
- b. to learn vocabulary related to our lives, and
- c. to practice discussion skills, giving opinions and giving presentations in English.

Learning aims include:

- a. to encourage critical thinking skills,
- b. to evaluate data and to judge the credibility of information,
- c. to be responsible for their own learning and assessment,
- d. to develop an open ended activity that will allow students to work to their full potential,
- e. to build upon the work studied each week and make connections to it over the semester, and
- f. to study thematic units.

Global issues aims include:

- a. to prepare students for dealing with people from other cultures,
- b. to develop empathy,
- c. to encourage appreciation and understanding rather than criticism, and
- d. to appreciate different viewpoints and thinking styles.

Literature review

Global Issues has been a topic of interest for many decades but is particularly of interest at the present time because of the current world situation. Research has shown that students are interested in global issues and that they want to learn about them. In a questionnaire put to 10-17 year olds in Britain in 1987, "Which of the problems facing the whole world worries you most?" the answer most frequently mentioned was famine and poverty followed by nuclear weapons and war (Hicks, 1988). Davies, (in Cooke, 1988) likewise, found that young people feel that they lack control over world events, and they also feel anxiety and fear in relation to nuclear issues.

Whittaker, (1988) describes a study of peace and world studies as not only learning but also recognizing the personal power of learning, "the freedom to take charge of one's own development and growth." (p. 26) In addition, Whittaker explains that "By learning to perceive the social and political contradictions in their lives, people grow in awareness of their social reality and develop a capacity to transform it." (p. 24) The importance of including a study of contemporary society, political and economic issues in the class is further supported by Hicks, "If such topics are not discussed, we do our students a grave disservice, for we send them ill prepared into the world, a world where they will

desperately need the skills of conflict resolution and, more than that, a willingness to struggle for justice, both in the context of their own lives and on behalf of the many other groups who find themselves oppressed in the world today.” (p.245, 1988)

Given such responses and views, the question then remains to what extent does the language educator feel required to help students make sense of these issues.

By exposing students to major debates and viewpoints, we help them to develop their skills of evaluation and in turn they are able to come to their own conclusions. (Cooke, 1988) In combination with learning the facts we are preparing our students to be better able to be part of a globalised world.

Methodology

This project has been designed with the above aims and issues in mind. Students are involved in research, data analysis, and data presentation. The project incorporates a variety of topics. A new topic is studied each week. A variety of tasks are used to suit different learners. These include debate, discussion, picture work, making graphs, writing, using flow charts, role play, quizzes, simulations, making comparisons, cloze exercises, maps, and research. Students are encouraged to use a variety of materials to source data including library books, the Internet and television. They are required to do most of their research for homework. They then bring the information to class either in data form or prepared in a format required for the lesson, eg; a quiz. Students also learn new skills for investigating and interpreting data. They are required to consider assumptions, or biases the author may have, and opinions written as fact. Debate is utilized to enable students to consider the very different values on any issue or problem that average citizens and political leaders may hold.

Course outline

Week 1—The world

Aim: To have students think about the difference between developed and developing regions of the world.

Ask students to name the continents/regions of the world. Elicit which regions belong to “developed” and “developing”. Discuss why these regions belong to either group. Regions may include; South America, North America, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Middle East, Pacific. Organise students into groups of four and ask them to select one continent/region of the developing world. They will work on this country for their project for the whole semester.

Once they have selected a region. Ask them to make a list of the countries that belong in that region. This will be hard for a lot of students so it is important to bring a map to the lesson and to give them some hints. From the list that they have developed, ask them to choose one country that they would like to work on. Suggest that lack of knowledge should not be a deterrent and encourage students by telling them that they will know a lot about the country at the end of the semester.

Once pairs have selected a country (there may be more than one set of pairs per region), they should be ready to work the entire semester with their partner and the other students from the same region.

Get the groups to brainstorm a list of topics that they would like to study about their country and topics that they feel are important to know about a country. Students may come up with the following topics; food, culture, rules, leaders, politics,

environment, race, population, education, law, sport, hobbies, gender roles, language, products, housing, clothing, and religion. Ask students to sort these topics into larger groups. One focus on people could include population, race, and language. Narrow the topics to groups such as: people, common knowledge, food, culture, politics, environment, and problems. For homework ask students to:

- a. research their country to find information regarding common knowledge about land size, population, currency, capital etc.,
- b. write a 100-word, news type story about their country, and
- c. prepare five quiz questions for their classmates.

Week 2—General knowledge

Aim: to gain a basic understanding of the country to be studied.

In groups of four (all members representing a different country) ask and answer the questions to the quiz. Students have prepared the quiz themselves so they are familiar with the vocabulary and are proud to share their new knowledge. Once completed students can read then their story that they prepared which contains the answers to the quiz. The project depends heavily on the amount of work that the students put in themselves. The more preparation they do, the more interesting the class time becomes. This will be apparent in this lesson. As students are mixed into groups of four, each a representative of a different country, they will realize that some students are better prepared than others and it is the quizzes of these well-prepared students that are more fun.

Week 3—Environment

Aim: To be able to visualize the chosen country in relation to its neighbours and to focus on its own environment.

Students prepare maps of their country. They use the research that they have prepared to make a “fill in the blanks” exercise. This can be done with their partner and once completed students form groups with new members to allow others to guess the answers. This exercise works well with a lesson plan based on comparatives/ superlatives, and environmental vocabulary.

Students can include information about rivers, mountains, cities, seas, neighbouring countries, states, borders, land forms, and pollution.

Week 4—Food

Aim: To gain an understanding of the distribution of the world's food and wealth.

In semester two, October 6th is World Food Day. This is an ideal time to implement this lesson.

Discuss the differences between needs and wants with students. Discuss the meanings of hunger, malnutrition, and starvation. Students guess how many children die a day from starvation (30,000), and how many people are suffering from hunger now (780 million), (World Hunger Facts, 2002). It is essential to put these figures into an amount the students can visualise eg; the number of children who will die today and everyday is equal to double the number of students at this university and 6 times the population of Japan is hungry now.

Review the countries which belong to the developed and developing world. This lesson is based on a simulation adapted from a lesson by Swee-Hin (1988, p133).

Ask all students to bring some food to the lesson. The teacher should bring some crackers or bread. Put the food on the teacher's table. Divide students to either of the developed or developing world. In a class of 20 students, have three or four represent the developed world. Ask them to take a seat, but spread out. All other students belong to the developing world. They must stand together in the corner of the room. Divide the food. Students belonging to the developing world receive the majority of the food. The remainders are distributed to the developing nations group.

Students can try to trade their food. This will highlight further the situation of people in poverty who do not have bargaining power to improve their situation.

Week 5—People

Aim: To appreciate the variety of races in the world and the situations of many of the world's people. Examine the country in relation to race and ethnic minorities. Consider refugees and gender roles/inequalities and ethnic conflict. Discuss how to present such information in an easy to understand format. Look at various techniques including, graphs, comics, pictures, and tables.

Week 6—Religion

Aim: To understand the differences between beliefs of different faiths.

Research the religions followed by the countries being researched. Make a table of comparisons of various religions. Information researched may include; place of worship, beliefs, powers, rulers, Gods, holy books, and ethnic conflict.

Week 7—Trade/resources

Aim: To examine ability/inability of the nation to trade. Research about the country's natural resources and products produced or manufactured. Produce a flow chart to track the natural resources and materials produced. Discuss the export and import trade. Attempt to analyse the ability of the nation to improve its economic situation.

Week 8—Politics and law

Aim: To realize the kinds of Governments in power as well as the amount of power that they may have.

Research the type of government in power and its leader. Introduce discussion on socialism/communism versus capitalism. Students can also discuss the terms of democracy, dictatorship, and fascism. This lesson is ideally suited to debate because it allows students to develop the differences in viewpoints of these political values. It forces students to find advantages to structures that they may not agree with.

Optional Aim: To understand the power the government has over the society.

Research the laws of the country. Make statements and change them into question form to make a quiz. This lesson is suitable for use with a lesson on rules and culture, human rights, or advice. It can be used with a lesson on "should" and "have to". Ask students to brainstorm topics for examination. These

may include; smoking, drugs, litter, traffic, military, marriage, voting, and cultural taboos.

Week 9—War and peace

Aim: To understand the causes and effects of wars between other countries and internal disputes.

Students research the history of the country in relation to wars. They then discuss the causes and effects of the various disputes. Further research into the country's spending can lead to interesting discussions, eg; a comparison of the military budget to the education budget. Research into production of nuclear weapons and whether their country exports/imports them and for what reasons can be very enlightening for the students. This may be able to be connected with some issue in the news, eg; terrorism, civil war, or international war.

Week 10—Focus

Aim: To investigate the kinds of problems that people suffer from in the world today.

Students research problems existing in their country. They make a display of the problems and try to make connections to other subjects discussed during this course. They should consider aid, the countries involved, and how long the problem has been continuing.

Secondary Aim: To examine the causes/effects of a global issues problem.

Look critically at the problems found and narrow the focus to one topic. Look at the cause, effects, history, government intervention, religion, culture, UN roles, aid agencies, people involved, and how they are involved. Students should consider

what could be done to help overcome this problem, which solution would be more successful, and who should implement it. Students roleplay an interview between a reporter and an aid worker who has just returned from the country.

Week 11—Poster preparation

Aim: To discuss techniques available for presenting information and to give opinions and make choices together. Indirectly, this lesson becomes a lesson in conflict resolution.

Week 12—Poster session

Aim: To practice presentation techniques and to examine other methods of presenting information.

Students put their posters on the wall of the classroom. This can be divided into two sessions if necessary. One of the pair should stay with their poster and be a spokesperson. Depending on the time allowed, give each partner half of the time as spokesperson. Other class members circulate, listen to and ask questions about the various posters. To ensure that all members participate, a quiz is prepared with questions relating to the various countries. This helps weaker students to ask questions and get involved in discussion.

Self evaluation

Students write their impressions and feeling about the project in their notebook. Ask them to consider the value of the project.

Various questions for consideration include:

- a. What did they like about it and what didn't they like?
- b. What did they learn?

- c. What would they like to do differently?
- d. How could the project be improved?
- e. What other topics could have been included?
- f. Which activity was the most interesting?
- g. Which poster did they like the most? Why?
- h. Which poster techniques were easiest to understand?
- i. Which were the most difficult?

Assessment

Students are required to keep a notebook with the weekly topics in order. This notebook can be used for giving the student a grade as well as their completed poster. Students are also graded on their ability to discuss topics relating to their country. This course requires active participation. Materials are generated by the student. By participating they increase the materials that they produce and thereby their grade increases. As the work is all produced by the students it is important to consider their own assessment of their work. Ask the students to grade their own work. Also ask them to write a comment about their work. To keep students mindful of their required participation, in this class, students were required to grade their own participation after each lesson on their class record card. Interest and participation of their partner is a good indication of their own work.

Course evaluation

This project overall was very successful. In week 2 there were some unprepared students, however, from week 3 students came to the class very well prepared. Students commented in their notebooks that they learned a lot about countries that they previously had not known anything about. They also commented that they found it interesting to be able to teach

and to learn from their peers. The poster session was also very successful with most students making outstanding efforts to illustrate the information that they had found. Some students stated that they found that too much research was required. In future courses, this writer would work more closely with weaker students to help them narrow their topic focus quickly and to ensure that they keep their research work on schedule.

Conclusion

In this paper the writer introduces a plan that enables teachers to incorporate a global issues themed project to their university classroom. The project benefits the students in that firstly, it increases their knowledge of the world's people helping them to be more globally aware and accepting of cultures different than their own. Secondly, it requires students to develop their own materials, which provides the need and want to communicate. Lastly, the project focuses on skills which help students to become better learners.

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