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Global Education: A Focus on Speaking Skills

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A one-year Global Education course for university EFL students will be described in this article. This course aims to facilitate students' communicative English proficiency. An emphasis is put on speaking skills, while providing students with a variety of information regarding environmental issues such as deforestation, global warming, ozone depletion, pollution and waste management in order to increase their knowledge and to promote their problem-solving skills. This course is designed from the author's perspective in that all four language skills have close relationships to the improvement of each skill. The course therefore is an integration of these four skills.

大学におけるEFL学生の為の、一年間の「地球教育」コースが拙論では述べられる。この地球教育コースは、スピーキングに重点が置かれていて、英語でのコミュニケーション能力を高める事を目的とするものである。しかしその一方で、森林破壊、地球温暖化、オゾン層の破壊、汚染、ゴミ処理問題といった環境問題に関して、学生に多くの情報を提供し、その知識を高め、そして彼らの問題解決能力を発展させる事も目指している。このコースは、4つの言語能力(話す、聞く、読む、書く)は互いに密接な関係があるが故に、これらの言語能力養成の為の練習は一つのクラスの中に統合されるべきである、と言う筆者の観点からデザインされている。

Introduction

Global Education, which is often used as a synonym for Global Issues, is a model of the content-based approach which aims to enable students to effectively acquire and use English, and improve their communicative competence. This conception could be easily carried out if the principles of Content-Based Instruction are utilized: 1) People learn a second (foreign) language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself. 2) People learn a second (foreign) language most successfully when the information they are acquiring is perceived as interesting, useful and leading to a desired goal. 3) Some content areas are more useful as a basis for language learning than others. 4) Students learn best when instruction addresses learners' needs (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 209-210). The reason why learners can successfully learn English by using it as a means for communication must be that there is an advantage for learners in increasing their vocabulary and acquiring the usage of it for communication.

With regard to content areas, global issues, particularly environmental issues, are thought to be interesting and useful for learners. This is demonstrated by the fact that a growing number of universities have established departments or courses studying environmental issues and also an increasing number of people and organizations have interest in doing something to protect the environment.

The plan for this one-year Global Education EFL course focusing on speaking skills will now be described.

The syllabus

The learning context

This course is for an oral English class for university EFL students. The target students are expected to have basic English conversational skills but lacking in conversational experience. The number of students in this class are about 30. The class is held once a week and the term of the course is one year.

The learners' needs

Communication

To obtain information by listening or reading, and processing, practicing and using the information obtained.

Learning-how-to-learn

To develop oral communication strategies to enable learners to compensate for ignorance in the target language and to repair breakdown.

General knowledge

To develop understanding of the problems which are occurring in the world concerning the environment.

The syllabus learning objectives

1. Students will be familiar with the vocabulary and expressions in the appropriate situations.
2. Students will be able to follow English conversations at natural speed.
3. Students will be able to make choices, make decisions and give opinions.
4. Students will be able to initiate speech, maintain and conclude conversations.

The course content

In this course, the students will be expected to improve their English speaking skills and at the same time, they will also be expected to raise their awareness, to increase their knowledge and to promote their problem-solving skills concerning environmental issues.

The author's textbook (unpublished) will be used in order for the students to achieve these aims mentioned above. Although the focus is on speaking skills, the author maintains that practice of all four skills, (speaking, listening, reading, writing) is necessary for the improvement of each skill. For example, by reading short passages before or during speaking practice, learners can increase their vocabulary and become familiar with words and phrases to enable them to express their opinions on various issues. Since Global Issues deals with difficult and unfamiliar terms for learners, this task is essential.

It is crucial for learners to have chances to practice and make use of what they have learnt for their improvement of speaking skills. Giving students this chance is one of the objectives of this class.

Week 1-week 5

The content material /Chapter I/Deforestation

Week 6-week 10

The content material/Chapter II/Global Warming

Week 11-Week 15

The content material/Chapter III/Ozone Depletion

Week 16-week 20

The content material/Chapter IV/Pollution

Week 21-week 25

The content material/Chapter V/Waste Management

The procedure of each class

Basically, each class is conducted by following the procedure outlined in the textbook. A sample of the textbook is given below.

Dialogue

Listen to the following dialogue and practice it with your partner.

Curtis : Hi, Joan. Are you ready to go?

Joan : Hi, Curtis. I'm sorry. (.....)

[.....]

Joan : Oh, don't you know? The sunshine is harmful, or rather I should say ultraviolet rays are harmful . (.....)

It causes skin cancer.

Curtis : But I've heard sunbathing makes our bones strong because the sunshine makes vitamin D in our bones.

Joan : Yes. But I read some articles saying that we were bathed in enough sunshine being necessary for our health in our daily lives. So we don't need to sunbathe on purpose.

Curtis : Oh, don't we?

Joan : No.

Curtis : But it's October now. (.....)

Joan : Oh, Curtis! The sun pours a lot ultraviolet rays even in October. And the recent shrinkage of the ozone layer causes a serious situation.

[.....]

Reading

Read the following passage carefully and intently, using a vocabulary list or dictionaries if necessary.

The ozone layer is a belt of oxygen from 15 to 35 kilometers above the earth. It protects life on the earth from the sun's harmful radiation such as ultraviolet rays by absorbing it.

[.....]

The depletion of the ozone layer would cause serious harm to life.

For example, it would cause skin cancer, eye cataract which result in blindness and could adversely affect the human immune system, too.

Listening

Listen to the passage above and read it aloud at least twice.

Discussion

(A) Discuss the following questions in pairs.

1) What is the ozone layer?

[.....]

6) What would the depletion of the ozone layer cause?

(B) Write what you have learnt from this chapter together with your opinions, ideas and so on. (at least 150 words)

(C) Discuss about the problem of the ozone layer depletion in groups.

Dialogue

Purposes of the *Dialogue* section include; to make the students do much verbal practice, to give them the chance to listen intently to material in English, and to enhance their proficiency in distinguishing words. Listening plays an important role helping students to improve their speaking skills. McDonough and Shaw point out “speaking is an active process and one which is difficult to dissociate from listening in many ways” (1993, p.153). Therefore, a listening exercise in this section is thought to be useful for the students from the point of view of language learning as a whole and the task of filling in the blanks useful for helping the students to concentrate on listening.

Another important purpose of *Dialogue* is to introduce the students to the topic that is dealt with in this chapter (eg.; ozone depletion). By practicing this conversation, the students can become familiar with some terms and phrases related to the problem of ozone depletion, such as, the ozone layer, ultra-violet rays and so forth, which often appear in the next section. The procedure in this section is as follows:

1. The students listen to the dialogue without looking at their textbooks.
2. The students fill in the blanks while listening to it three or more times.

3. The teacher gives the students answers to the questions (telling them what should be in the blanks.)
4. The teacher allows the students to ask questions about anything that they do not understand and then he/she explains it.
5. The students listen to the dialogue again.
6. The teacher divides the students into pairs and makes them practice the dialogue. They are supposed to practice it twice. That is, the second time, they play the alternate role.
7. Some pairs demonstrate the dialogue in front of the class.

Reading

The purposes of *Reading* are to give the students information to increase their knowledge and to build up their vocabulary concerning the topic. The students do a reading practice here because the most effective way to increase knowledge and vocabulary and to retain new pieces of information is thought to be reading something dealing with topics which they will later talk about. Moreover, reading helps learners to improve their abilities of interpretation and understanding of English. In addition, being familiar with the structure of sentences including specific terms and phrases helps them to become more proficient in the practical usage of English, too. The procedure in this section is as follows:

1. The students read the passage. They are allowed to use a vocabulary list or dictionary if necessary.
2. The teacher allows the students to ask questions about anything that they do not understand and then he/she explains it. The explanation is both linguistic and a brief translation.

Listening

One of the aims of *Listening* is to let the students check the pronunciation and the accent of each word in the passage. Therefore, making them listen to it carefully and intently is necessary. Reading aloud practice immediately follows the listening practice because reading aloud what the students have listened to, as soon as possible, can help them to do the task more easily since the memory of pronunciation and accent remains more vivid. This task also gives the students good chances to use spoken English. The procedure is as follows:

1. The students listen to the passage twice or three times checking the pronunciation and the accent of each word.
2. As soon as they finish the listening practice, they read the passage aloud at least twice individually.

Discussion

Discussion must be the most difficult task for the students. Therefore some questions, which are not open questions in the strict sense of the word, are prepared for them in (A) of *Discussion*. Here they are only required to ask those questions to his/her partner and answer them alternately. The students are expected to get used to the form of questions and the way to exchange questions for answers here. Since the students may look at the reading passage, or rather they are encouraged to look at it and make use of words and phrases in it, they have a good opportunity to practice using what they have learnt. This task must be a good preliminary exercise in preparation for either of the other two discussion practices which would be more difficult for them.

Every chapter consists of two parts. Dialogues and reading passages are supposed to be completed with both Part 1 and Part 2 activities. Almost all the practices in Part 2 are the same as the ones in Part 1 except the two tasks at the end of Part 2. They are the task (B) and the task (C) of *Discussion*. In the task (C), the students are divided into a group of four or five people, and they discuss the issues dealt with in each chapter and give their opinions. However, before doing the free discussion in groups (task C), the students do writing practice in (B). It may seem a little strange to make the students do writing practice before discussion considering this is not a writing class. However, writing also has a close relationship to speaking. That is to say, that both speaking and writing follow the same procedure. First, pieces of information which people want to transmit are composed and then they are outputted. Consequently, it is essential for the students to do the exercise of composing sentences before free conversations.

Conclusion

Five weeks are necessary to finish each chapter of this textbook with a total of 25 weeks necessary for the entire course. This is a simulation Global Education course and has not been performed yet. However, some of the exercises have been implemented in the author's oral English class. The students have watched videos dealing with global issues and had listening practice. They also made presentations in groups on themes such as environmentally friendly fuel, global warming, pollution, the Internet, waste management, the ozone layer depletion, and so forth. They were given one week for preparation. The interesting finding was that students spent much time for preparation in reading rather than writing or memorizing. They said that they had much trouble in writing

their ideas at first but after getting advice to read something dealing with the topic on which they were going to make presentation, their task became much easier. This is good evidence that reading also plays an important role even in speaking classes.

Finally, the most difficult thing in any Global Education course must be to evaluate or assess the students' achievement concerning content (global issues). It would not be appropriate to judge their achievement of this course only on whether they have retained enough information concerning those issues and have developed their problem-solving skills or not, because this course is not focused on sociology but English language. However, it is necessary for teachers to evaluate the students' degrees of comprehension in some form.

References

- McDonough, J. & Shaw, C. (1993). *Materials and Methods in ELT*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.