

Preparing our Students to be Global Citizens

Amanda O'Brien
Doshisha Women's College

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This paper introduces a course that is designed to motivate students and encourage independent learning. It has been implemented in a college/university class but could also be used in any adult classes. The course focuses on global issues as it affects all class participants and is considered to be a topic that addresses student's fears and interests (Hicks, 1988). The course includes a study of various countries and global issues allowing students to become more globally aware. Within this framework, methods for increasing student involvement and interest are employed. These techniques will be the focus of this paper.

ここで紹介するコースは学生たちのモチベーションを高め、自ら学ぶことを促すよう考えられたものです。このコースは主に大学の講義で用いられていますが、社会人を対象としたクラスにも適しています。コースの題材にはクラスの参加者全員に関係するグローバルな事柄を用います。そして、ただ単におもしろい事柄のみならず、不安に感じるもの等もトピックとなり得ます(Hicks, 1988)。また、学生達が物事を見るより広い視野を持つことができるよう様々な国や事象についても学びます。これらにより学生たちの興味、意欲をより一層向上させることができるのです。本論文ではこれらのテクニックを紹介します。

Japanese university students have usually studied English for the best part of six years; three years at Junior High School and three years at High School. It is important to consider this in planning university English courses, because selecting material that has been studied before is likely to bore the students and choosing material that is of no interest or use is likely to be uninspiring. As curriculum designers and teachers we should be careful in selecting both topics and activities to be used in the classroom. Global Issues was chosen as a topic for this course because it is relevant to student's lives. I hoped that the students would find it interesting and therefore be more motivated to use English to discuss the topic. No research was undertaken to determine the success of the course, however, I will discuss my general feelings and impressions. Surprisingly, although it was assumed that students would naturally become interested in the course because of the topic choice, it appears that the activities employed were key to ensuring that the students became interested in the topic. The aims of the course are discussed in the following section, however, it seems that by achieving the secondary aims, this course was then able to also meet the primary aims.

The focus in this paper will be on the kinds of activities and techniques employed in this course and how and why these were successful in encouraging interest in the topic, global issues, and ultimately in improving student's English ability. A detailed plan of the steps involved in designing this project can be found in O'Brien (2003).

Aim

This project was first designed to increase student awareness of the world (developed and developing) in order to understand cultural differences and appreciate situations different to their own, thus improving the student's ability to deal with people from other cultures. Secondary aims included improving English ability, improving learning skills, increasing independent learning, and improving motivation. Although no research was undertaken to measure the success of the course in meeting these aims, it was apparent that the course was most successful in fulfilling the secondary aims. This could be seen in the greater use of L2, the better preparation of homework, the greater effort in producing their own materials and conducting their own research than had been noticed in the previous semester. By meeting these secondary aims, the course was then able to meet the primary aims. This paper will therefore be based on a discussion of the design of the course in relation to these secondary aims.

Students

The project was conducted in three classes consisting of 20 first-year Japanese University students, 50% male and female in each. Of these, more than 75% were English majors. The rest majored in other languages. The classes had a lesson twice a week. The weekly lessons were divided into one textbook lesson using a popular EFL textbook, whereas the other required students to generate the materials and was based on global issues. In the textbook lesson students changed partners each week, while in the global issues lesson they worked with the same partner each week. This

course was held in the second semester and was 14 weeks long. The writer also taught the students in the first semester. In that class, students studied the same EFL textbook twice a week.

Procedure

Topic Selection

In the first lesson, students select the country that they will study for the entire semester. They are therefore responsible for their own selection. Once this choice has been made, students are unable to change. This lesson is designed to introduce the concepts of developed and developing nations. Students are advised to select a country that is considered to be from the developing nations group. Here, it is important to remind students that lack of knowledge should be a good reason for choosing a country rather than a deterrent. This class sets the mood for the entire project. The teacher provides one print for this lesson (see O'Brien, 2003). The rest of the lesson requires students to make choices and to brainstorm topics that will be of interest to them in studying for the semester. At the end of this and all lessons thereafter, the teacher should make it clear to students exactly what is required of them in the following lesson. It is in relaying this information after the first lesson that is the key in developing good student participation in this project.

To ensure that student participation is high, it is of utmost importance to have students interested in the project. Likewise, to have students interested in the project usually requires that they are involved in it. By enforcing student involvement in lessons two and three, interest in the project

is triggered and voluntary participation follows. I have not researched or studied this premise but merely outline it here as a result of the steps taken in this particular course.

Here I will explain briefly how I enforce student participation in lesson two. At the end of lesson one, I ask students to research the country that they have selected on the Internet or the library and to bring all the information that they have found to the lesson. In addition, they are to prepare a 100-word news story on their country. At this time I give them an example of a story that I have prepared about Japan. I remind them to use points that they have come up with in their brainstorming during lesson one. They must also prepare five quiz questions that relate directly to the news story that they have made.

Once the homework is clear, I then tell the students that what they bring will totally comprise the materials for lesson two. Therefore, if they are unprepared they will have nothing to do in the lesson and will be unable to participate. As a result they will be marked absent.

In my classes I found that 10 – 50% of the students in each class came to lesson two unprepared. I asked these students to sit to one side. Students who had materials were then paired and proceeded to exchange information. Thus, students who were participating were marked present and those who were not participating were marked absent. In all classes there was 100% student participation in lesson three. In all following lessons students were always prepared for the lesson and, as a result, appeared more motivated and interested in the project. This could be observed in the development in materials brought to the class, the amount of discussion in L2, and in the quality of the posters used in the final presentation.

Material Preparation

Students are required to bring materials to every lesson. Using the Internet to find the information that they needed was the most convenient method. In the first lesson I asked students to bring information that they had found. This is a good time to check all students' materials and to give advice on Internet searching. Only a few students had used English sites. Advising students how to search for English sites benefits them in that they are reading more in English and are exposed to the natural vocabulary of the topic, which they can then utilize in their material preparation.

Activity Design

In asking students to prepare materials for the lesson, it is important to consider in advance the type of information that they are collecting and the activities that will be most suitable for examining this information.

Each week students were involved in different activities. These were selected or designed on their appropriateness to the weekly topic. Weekly topics included focuses such as: food, culture, rules, leaders, politics, environment, race, population, education, law, sport, hobbies, gender roles, language, products, housing, clothing, and religion. By changing the activity each week, students were constantly challenged. Activities included: debate, discussion, picture work, making graphs, writing, using flow charts, role play, quizzes, simulations, making comparisons, cloze exercises, maps, and research. Providing an example of the activity at the end of the lesson and also reminding students that they must prepare their own materials to participate in the next lesson's

activity seemed to ensure active involvement of students. For example, debate was used with a lesson on politics. Students were required to research different political philosophies outside the lesson and then bring that information to the class and, with their partner, they were to prepare an argument either for or against topics such as *Communism cares for the whole society*. This type of activity requires preparation. By ensuring that students must prepare for the lesson in order to participate, the teacher creates the situation in which students have information to share and they also improve the likelihood that students will become interested in the topic because they have actively researched the topic themselves.

Information Giving

In order for true communication to take place, students need to have something that they wish to communicate. In each lesson students were the holders of such information. They had all prepared for the lesson so that they were the holder of a particular piece of information. This information was not something that they just opened their textbook to “page 65” and dictated. It was information that they had researched and put together into some format for the lesson. The students seemed proud to be the holder of this information.

Information Receiving

Likewise, students are in need of their partner’s information to complete their task for the lesson. This adds a level of competitiveness to the lesson. Once they have parted with their own information they want to be sure to be able to receive their partner’s information correctly in order to complete the activity.

Poster

At the end of the course the students have to make a poster presentation. I gave no demands or restrictions on how they do this. The only directions they received was that they should compile all their information that they have been working on during the semester into a poster and present it as a pair. During the lesson we discussed presentation techniques and how to make their poster effective. The students then prepared some of their poster in the lesson and some of it in their own time

Poster Presentation

We held a poster session in the last lesson of the semester. It was this class that really surprised me. Students were so well prepared. Many students had more than one poster for their presentation and a couple of pairs had about six posters. Students really were interested in the project. The poster session was really fun too.

The class pairs were divided into two groups. Group one put their posters on the wall around the room. We had six pairs in group one and group two. Pairs then decided who would speak first and who would speak second. The first speaker stood in front of their poster and the second speaker went to the next poster clockwise. All students in group two were then divided equally amongst the posters. The first speaker had to speak for five minutes about their poster while three students listened. After five minutes the three students listening moved to the next poster clockwise. Each speaker speaks for five minutes, three times. The listeners rotate around the room. After the third time, speaker one

joins the listening group and speaker two moves to their poster. Speaker two then speaks for five minutes, three times. All the posters are then taken down and group two puts their posters on the wall and the procedure is repeated.

Students seemed to have fun doing these presentations. They were able to talk about their poster and answer individual questions in a relaxed atmosphere. As most students had spent considerable time and energy on their poster, they were eager to show and discuss their work with the listeners. These posters comprised the information that they had been working on each week and, as such, it was familiar to them. They therefore “talked about” their poster instead of preparing a speech and reading it, which has been typical behaviour in poster presentations before this project.

Assessment

At the beginning of the class I advise students that there will be no test in this class. Their assessment will be primarily based on their participation in the lesson. There is also a score for their journal and poster. The journal is used for their weekly activities and material preparation. Students therefore understand that it is their involvement in the class that will determine a good assessment for them. To keep students mindful of the fact that it is their own effort that they are being graded on, I ask them to give a score for their work occasionally or for their partner to give them a score. Their partner’s interest is a good indication of their own work.

Evaluation

Further indication of the success of this project was seen in the student’s impressions, which they were required to write in their journal at the end of the course. Various questions for consideration included:

- a) What did students like about the course, 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?

Of most interest was the outstanding number of satisfied students. Many wrote that they found this a great opportunity to learn about cultures they didn’t know. They also felt that doing the research for the project made it more interesting. Students also enjoyed the group work and said that they were able to converse on interesting topics with different groups of people.

Future Possibilities

This course highlighted the importance of the role of activities and teacher guidance in ensuring student interest in the topic. In future when conducting this course, it would

be beneficial to examine individual factors that generate or destroy student interest in the topic to enable better planning of the course.

Conclusion

In this paper I describe some of the techniques that contributed to the success of a project based on Global Issues for university students. The course discussed enables students to increase their knowledge of the world and prepares them to be global citizens. It is important to incorporate activities and techniques that increase student motivation in order to pique their interest in this topic. This project requires students to develop their own materials, providing the need and want to communicate. As a result of the choice of activities, I found that students became motivated and interested in the course.

References

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