Enhancing student awareness of global issues

Kazufumi Endo
Teachers College of Columbia University in Tokyo

In the context of the increasing adoption of global issues in English textbooks, the significance of English class with a good coverage of both linguistic and content aspects is growing. As empowerment of students with knowledge, skills, and commitment as world citizens for the solution of global problems should be prioritized in global issue classes, instructors are expected to investigate how it is feasible to reach the goal despite mountainous difficulties. For this reason, this paper was designed to illustrate how students should get involved with the contents of their reading material. The researcher utilized available information through various media such as videotapes and realia. Since student response to the issues seemed to be enriched in the process, information provided in class could be argued to boost student interest in the topics and deeper student involvement.

テキストに取り上げられる題材として、環境、人権等のテーマが増加の一途を辿る。そのようなトピックを扱う時に、学習者の背景知識の欠如が、障害になる。その求められる情報をどの様に与えるかは、常に模索していかなければならない。関連情報の効果が、内容に対する洞察にどの様な効果をもたらすかを、考察してみた。

In the context of the increased focus on global issues in English textbooks, the significance of English class with a balanced coverage of both linguistic and content aspects is growing. Indeed, the meaning of global-issue education cannot be denied because the aim of this type of education is designed to lay the foundations for a better world (Cates, 1990). Instructors are supposed to implant the sense of equality, peace, justice, freedom, and human rights into students and the learners are expected to be trained to work for a better world. And instructors are required to have learners feel responsibility as world citizens. Therefore, it is well worth considering what is required of an English class dealing with global issues.

The demand on the class is great and diverse because in global-issue education classes attitudes to promote peace, cultural diversity, social justice and to cherish a sustainable environment are encouraged

(Dyer & Bushell, 1996). Also, a requirement for instructors is recognition of their "unique responsibility in promoting peace, justice, and an active concern for the world's problems" (Cates & Mark, 1990). As Cates and Mark (1990) argue, the significance of empowerment of students - with knowledge, skills, and commitment as world citizens for the solution of global problems - together with acquisition of a foreign language should be prioritized in global issue classes. In this context, instructors are expected to investigate how it is feasible to reach the goal despite mountainous difficulties such as student apathy and lack of content knowledge. Above all survey conducted in April in 2005 revealed that about 80 percent of the students put the foremost priority on literal translation and they had no resources but dictionaries in reading.

However, the imminence of such issues as the environments, human rights cannot allow student aloofness, and the class may not be allowed to end up in literal translation. Learners are supposed to possess "knowledge, skills, concern" (Cates, 1990, p. 4) for the issues and ideally take actions to alleviate global problems. For these reasons, this project was designed to illustrate how students could become involved with the contents of their reading material and ideally to help them engage directly with the issues in the text. The researcher utilized available realia in various forms such as videotapes and newspaper articles. The goal being to empower students with knowledge pertinent with the issues and help students interact with texts more actively and feel closer to the subject matter and be aware of their responsibility as citizens on the earth. In the next section, crucial elements of global education will be examined.

Literature review

The curriculum of an English class dealing with topics related to global issues is claimed to activate learners' background knowledge or content schemata and work for the enhancement of learner motivation to interact with texts (McIntyre, 1996). In addition, individual experiences should be utilized (Mark, 1990). Barnett (1989) also looks at schemata from the viewpoint of interactive reading processes.

However, just presenting knowledge pertaining to global issues is not enough. Educational professionals are responsible for "transforming learners' perceptions of their responsibility in nature and society" (Bushell & Dyar, 1996, p. 14). While and after reading, students are supposed to express their values and to think and speak critically about world issues by judging and synthesizing other perspectives (Bushell & Dyar, 1996).

In the next section, a methodology to measure the degree of student involvement with the content of texts will be described.

Methodology

I have taught a reading class of 12th graders which consists of 18 boys and 10 girls since April 2005 at a public, co-educational high school in the eastern part of Shizuoka Prefecture.

The class read more than five stories in the textbook and two stories of which, *We Share the Same Earth* and *Children at Work* in *New Cosmos Reading* (Ohura et al., 2004) are strongly connected to global issues. The former covers environmental issues and the other deals with child labor. Students had the class for four 50 minute periods each week.

This project was begun at the beginning of April in 2005 and conducted for two and a half months.

I usually prepared two kinds of handouts for each class meeting. One type was pre-reading questions, focused on activating student background knowledge and encouraging student interest in the topics or stories they were to read. The other type of handout included a sheet of background and pictorial information. In addition CD-ROMs, video tapes, newspaper articles, as well as web-pages were often used. Before and during textbook reading, students were given information relevant to topics of stories several times until the class finished reading one story.

Triangulation methods which consisted of student response to open-ended questions, entries of classroom interaction in the teaching journal, and surveys and interviews were applied. After students were presented with background information, student transformation and change of student attitudes toward issues and to what extent students got involved in the content were to be examined. At the final stage of story reading, student response to open ended questions was to be classified in terms of degree of student involvement with the contents. The questions were open-ended and the students were allowed to write their opinions and impressions freely.

Ada's (1988a, 1988b) creative reading methodology was used to dentify which stage each student response reflected. Ada (1988a, 1988b) asserts that students will engage in a dialogue with any text and that ideally student critical reflection should influence their daily lives. Ada (1988a, 1988b) distinguishes three phases: descriptive, interpretative, and action stage.

In the descriptive stage, students write about the contents of the stories. In the personal interpretative stage, students write about their own opinions and interaction between texts and students is established. In the action stage, students start to take action by means of knowledge or skills they have been empowered with. However, as it will be extremely difficult to confirm student actions outside of class, any idea expressing student intention to carry out something outside of class is categorized as part of the action stage.

The teaching journal is to be examined from the viewpoint of examining the change of student interaction with stories as well as those between learners and the instructor.

In the surveys and interviews, students are to be asked the following to examine a shift of student priority from literal translation to their involvement with the contents and empowerment of students: (a) the purposes of attending English classes, (b) the resources in reading texts, (c) their impression on information pertinent to stories, as well as (d) the significance of translation. This survey was conducted at the beginning of the course and two and half months later. Five students, randomly chosen, were interviewed at the same time as the second survey.

Findings

When the class read *Children at Work* and *We Share the Same Earth*, more than half of the students' written work on the stories reached the personal interpretative stage or the action stage in both cases. In general, student interaction with the stories was found to be deepened in the process of reading.

The following are some examples of the descriptive stage, personal interpretative stage and action stage on child labor. H.W. [initials used for student names] simply wrote information in the textbook when they were asked to give their impressions at the onset of the reading of the story. "There are so many children who have to work instead of going to school. I didn't know that" (H. W.). However, A. K. wrote her own interpretation. "So far I have not been so conscious of it, I should not waste food and (sic) treat objects with care and send some things unnecessary to such children". The following is a typical example of the action stage written by the same student after reading of the text proceeded further; "I often watch TV advertisement to tell us that vaccine donation is possible just by calling the organizer. I used to think that I had nothing to do with it. But I am different now. If I have a chance, I would like to donate". It can be argued that the involvement of this student has become deeper at this stage than at the beginning of reading the story. It can also be claimed that as A. K. has empowered herself with some skills, a more down-to-earth idea on how she was capable of alleviating child labor can be expressed.

N. N. wrote the following A work while watching the UNICEF tape. The same student essay can be argued to have developed into B work by the time the class finished reading the story. Not just the length but also more commitment is expressed in his latter work.

> Though I feel it obligatory to do something for them, good idea is not likely to be born. I don't have to think of saving all the poor children on earth, but I should do something within my own

capacity. However I must figure out what is possible for me to do. (A work)

In comparison to A work, B work reveals his possible action to ease the pain of children and a couple of feasible actions Furthermore B-work sounds more concrete and the concept of more cooperation and sympathy can be found.

> I want to raise funds for poor children because they live with difficulty. I want to encourage poor children. For example, I present some gifts for them and I can send letters to them from Japan. Another instance I would like to do is to go to see poor children.

> Our faith "Think Globally, act locally" is very important. So if I see poor people, I must help them. We should help each other. And we should take sympathetic actions. (B work)

The same change can be noticed in the case of reading *We Share the Same Earth*. Although little was said when they were asked their impression of the Kyoto Protocol at the beginning of the reading, in time more actively involved responses were found. The following work is one example. It can be argued that the involvement of this student has become deeper at this stage than at the beginning of the reading of the story. As A. K. could not express her opinion on curving carbon dioxide, it can also be claimed that A. K. has empowered herself with some skills on how she was capable of alleviating the effects.

> We should treasure plants. We must reduce carbon dioxide. For example we should not use carsbut bicycles. I think many countries should join the

Kyoto Protocol. Industrialization is very important but to save the earth is more important. (A. K.)

As the table below shows, in both cases, *Children at Work* and *We Share the Same Earth*, the number of the responses which reached the personal interpretative and the action stage exceeded that of the descriptive stage.

Table 1. Number of students at each stage

Story	Reading Stage	No. of Students	Percentage
Children…	Descriptive	7	25
	Personal Interpretative	9	32
	Action	12	43
We Share…	Descriptive	6	21
	Personal Interpretative	12	42
	Action	10	37

Personal interpretative and action stage responses are often found to refer to content schemata or background information presented in class such as child soldiers used for reconnaissance at war fronts. Although it is up to students to use it or not, schemata from videos or CD-ROMs shown in class was often found to be utilized to support student argument.

In the survey conducted in April, it was revealed that the majority of the students gave precedence to translation in class. However, the survey conducted two and half months later seemed to show some changes in perspective: the number of the students who wish to utilize the contents for their future has gradually been on the increase.

The survey reveals that while the resource students most resorted to in reading at the beginning of April was found

to be dictionaries, it seems that a slight change has been developing. It can be asserted that more students have come to use information, experience, and pictures, too. One of the conceivable reasons for the increase is questions related to the subject matter provided in the process of reading such as "Have you ever seen any low teen-agers who have to work on the street at day time?" The survey reveals questions which help students guess what kind of stories they are going to read. Interviewed students and the survey results reveal the same. The interviewees and survey told me that questions as well as information related to a topic gave them the idea of genre and the outline of the text.

Table 2. Student priority for English class

Activity	No. of Students in April	in the middle of July
Translation	26	19
Interaction with Stories	4	10
Appreciation of Stories	8	11

Table 3. Student resource in reading

Resource	No. of Students in April	in the middle of July
Dictionary	28	24
Information	6	10
Experience	8	11
Others	3	12

As the table shows, student priority seems to be shifting from translation to more student involvement with the contents. In April when the class started, the survey shows literal translation took precedence over anything else.

However, the survey conducted two and half months later reveals that about sixty percent of the students have started to demand something more than translation when they are asked if they feel satisfied with only translation. Four of the five interviewed students disclosed their opinion on translation by arguing that translation is not always needed as long as they can get the gist of stories.

The teaching journal discloses that a shift in the type of interactions was being generated and more active answers and responses from students were starting to appear. At the beginning of the lesson, *We Share the Same Earth*, my teaching journal disclosed that the majority did not know even the fact that Tuvalu is a country, still less the condition facing the country. Student responses were spotted in my teaching journal such as "What is that?" or "I do not know." However, gradually student response seemed to become more active and critical. Responses such as "I think…," or "I am not so sure but…" were spotted more. Little by little questions such as the following came from students "Even if Tuvalu and the Maldives sink, what will become of Japan?"

The same was the case with the issue of the Kyoto Protocol. Although student response to the Protocol was almost none at the beginning, some responses gradually started to be heard after the provision of handouts and watching of a CD ROM.

In general, authentic material as well as realia including videotapes and CD ROMs seemed to be favorably accepted by students and could be claimed to help learners become more intrigued with the content.

The responses from the five students I interviewed sounds so similar to the results of the questionnaires. They were in favor of information from the viewpoint of motivation to read the stories, to put themselves in the situations described in the stories and to be aware of the prevalence and seriousness of issues. In addition the interviewees unanimously argue that realia and various types of information helped them remember the issues. Still, none of the interviewees deny the use of contents of stories in class for their future. So English class can be argued to have a connection with student life and the future. Though they do not explicitly state how they will utilize their knowledge and opinion, students who wish to use the contents in their future has gradually been on the increase.

Discussion

Actually in the course of a two-week reading of one story, students who seemingly became empowered with knowledge and information were found helping students who tend to possess their own ideas on the issues in the texts. As Carrell (1983, 1987) and other researchers (Chapham, 1996; Jenssen & Housen, 1995) have reiterated, the significance of content schemata provided in class is often found to boost student interest in the topics of stories. Together with schemata, prereading questions seem to incite students to interact with the contents because student responses have been enriched in the process.

Although it is not certain how student involvement with the issues will affect their life in the future, their responses to the topics in the form of their written work and responses in classroom interaction could be judged to bring deeper student involvement in the issues.

This trend in which students were claimed to empower themselves seems to suggest global issue classes are worthwhile because students seem to take the issues to be related with their future. Although it is almost impossible to confirm whether students will carry out their ideas outside of class, those students whose work could be argued to have reached the personal interpretative or action stage can be claimed to have grown to be prospectively responsible action takers in the future.

Implication

As English classes integrated with the imminent world issues should ideally contribute to bringing about the welfare of human beings, instructors are required to make the classrooms relate to human beings' real life. With regards to teaching procedure, Higgins advocates the "Consultation Method" (1990, pp.32-33). Under this procedure, learners are supposed to agree on problems in the world and to gather facts and opinions. They are then expected to share opinions and to decide on the solution and carry out the decision. Finally, they are required to review the decision and modify it if necessary. If the procedure is fulfilled, learners are regarded as full-fledged action takers.

Conclusion

The goal of global issue education is the construction of the basis for a better world and active student involvement in the issues is crucial to human life. Indeed it might be argued that individuals, still less high school students, can not exert any substantial influence to effect even their nearby society.

However, many autonomy and global- issue papers advocate learner enhancement and empowerment through knowledge and skills, and in the process learners will hopefully also be expected to exert themselves to be active players for a better world (Cates 1990; Mark, 1990).

As there might not be an ideal methodology to empower students with knowledge and skills, it is vital for instructors to keep themselves informed and continue their ongoing search for methods to transform learners into real action takes for the future.

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