

# Learning to create sustainable change

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This paper presents a seven-step framework to assist students to independently select real-world issues, learn about them, and teach each other using English. These steps have been designed and refined to greatly enhance the chances of success. Students select an issue, identify the sources, set SMART goals to change the source of the problem, recruit help, learn from more experienced groups, take action, and follow up.

本論では学生に役立つ7つのステップを紹介する。学生が実社会で直面する問題を自律的に選び、その課題に関して学び、お互いに英語を使って教え合う。このステップは、成功するためのチャンスをより高めるために考案されている。学生は課題を設定し、問題点を明確にし、SMARTゴールを設定し、周りの人々と積極的に関わり合い、自分達より豊富な経験を持つグループから学び、継続性を持って行動することで、問題を解決する。

**B**efore you read this article, please think about your students' educational experiences and answer the following questions:

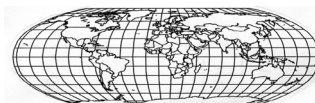
- Do your students learn about real-world problems at school?
- Do your students research and discuss to find educated, multifaceted approaches to tackle problems in a realistic manner based on a sense of social responsibility, not just towards their local communities, but as part of a global community?
- Do your students then implement these solutions to create sustainable change? Do they take action to address the sources of the problems to improve the situation, instead of sitting idly on their brilliant solutions?

If you answered, "No" to any of these questions, please keep reading.

When students learn about problems and even go so far as to outline realistic solutions, how useful will their education be if they never learn to implement a plan? One of the best things about a language classroom is that, with appropriate scaffolding, students can learn a language while doing almost anything. The rest of this article will introduce a seven-step framework,

## SIG Spotlight: GILE SIG

JALT's Global Issues in Language Education Special Interest Group (GILE SIG)



aims to promote global awareness, international understanding, and action to solve world problems through content-based language teaching, drawing from fields such as global education, peace education, environmental education, and human rights education. The SIG produces a quarterly newsletter, organizes presentations for local, national, and international conferences, and maintains contacts with groups ranging from Amnesty International to Educators for Social Responsibility to UNESCO. Contact us for a sample newsletter, or for more information about our SIG's work in "teaching for a better world."

- Website: <[gilesig.org](http://gilesig.org)>
- Facebook: <[facebook.com/gilesig.org](https://facebook.com/gilesig.org)>
- Email: <[kcates@rstu.jp](mailto:kcates@rstu.jp)>

presented at the JALT2011 conference, to enable your students to take the initiative in identifying, understanding, and solving problems in a realistic and sustainable manner while learning a language.

## A framework overview

### Step 1: Choose a problem

Have students form groups of four. Ask them to think of a problem that they want to solve. For example, a group of my students were concerned that not all children in Asia are able to go to school. If your students have difficulty choosing a problem, ask them to review statistics on the UN's Resources for Speakers (2013). The statistics listed on this site relate to problems faced by many people around the world.

### Step 2: Map the sources of the problem

Have each group research and create a mind map (Illumine Training, n.d.). Each branch of the

map should list a source of the problem with examples. Addressing the sources of a problem is essential for creating sustainable change. It is important for students to be able to identify these at this stage. To help struggling groups identify sources of problems, ask pointed questions, such as “Why?” Once students complete their mind map, it is recommended to have them focus on one source of the problem, within a limited area. This will make subsequent tasks less overwhelming and greatly improve the chances for success.

The following, for example, outlines the contents of part of a possible mind-map that students might create on the topic of children’s education in Vietnam. The actual mind map would be structured with circles connected with lines instead of numerals and letters.

#### Sample Mind Map (extract)

1. Education levels amongst ethnic minority children in Vietnam are very low.
  - a. Children spend their time supporting their families instead of going to school.
    - i. They often fetch water.
      1. The seasonal rivers often run dry and they have to go farther and farther to get water.
      2. The water is not always potable.

#### Step 3: Set goals

Introduce SMART goals. A SMART goal is

- S** pecific
- M** easurable
- A** ttainable
- R** ealistic / **R** elevant
- T** ime oriented

(Amnesty International, 2008, p. 7)

An example of a SMART goal my students set is to organize charity events in Japan over the next four months to raise 15,000 yen. This money will be used to build one well at an elementary school in rural Vietnam, allowing children to attend school and to support their families. Encourage students to make many SMART sub-goals as well. To meet their goals, ask students to contribute their time, energy, and ideas. This will test their ingenuity and give them experience planning and implementing a business action

plan. By gathering money and/or supplies from the community, the students become representatives of all those who contribute. It is a fun way for students to build a stronger local community.

#### Step 4: Build a team

Students should ask friends and community members to join them, making sure everyone involved shares a common vision. This will keep the group working together and prevent possible disagreements. A written goal, displayed publicly on posters or a blog, may be a convenient method to facilitate clear communication.

#### Step 5: Collaborate with others

Encourage your students to work with other groups. They are probably not the only ones who want to improve the situation. For example, my students contacted the *Ethnic Minorities Outreach* NPO. This group has a Japan chapter that organizes the construction of wells at schools and works with local priests and social workers in rural Vietnam to distribute aid directly to those in need.

#### Step 6: Take action

Challenge your students to educate others and work to change the sources of the problems chosen in Step 1. You may choose to support your students in their efforts, but be mindful to let them lead. For example, a group of my students collected unwanted used goods and sold them at local festivals. They held charity concerts and a charity soccer tournament. They also made curry rice to sell to hungry soccer players at the tournament. At each event, they educated participants about their project. As a result, they earned 180,000 yen (\$2,300) in about two months. Of that, they used 45,000 yen (\$570) to build three wells, providing clean and reliable water to approximately 300 Vietnamese families. The students decided to use the rest for aid following severe floods in Vietnam. This activity inspired ten students to pay their own way to Vietnam to distribute the aid they provided as part of an Ethnic Minorities Outreach NPO trip. Two years later, six of these students are planning a return trip to Vietnam. This is no longer part of a class. They are recruiting younger students and training them in how to create sustainable change as a club activity. They are earning money faster than before and continuing to study the challenges facing Vietnam to determine how to best use the money they raise.

### Step 7: Follow up

Have students report progress and celebrate their successes. To give these activities a language-learning focus, assign presentations after each step and a written portfolio to document their efforts. Collaborating with an English-speaking group, through the use of a blog, may also be worth investigating.

### Embedding language learning tasks

There are many ways to implement this general framework. I've experimented quite a lot and found that each time it generates excellent language-learning opportunities. It leads groups of students to independently select real-world issues, learn about them, and teach each other using English. It harnesses students' intrinsic motivation and introduces vocabulary relevant to the topics that they are passionate about. Student-centered, task-based learning activities provide opportunities for extensive informal language practice. With multiple groups studying different global issues, information gaps are naturally created. This is ideal for cooperative learning and peer teaching within a communicative language class. The content knowledge that students generate continually grows and is perfect for formal speeches. On the other hand, researching and planning using English within their groups provides many chances for informal language use. This combination of activities creates a nice balance for practicing both formal and informal language.

### Conclusion

The framework introduced here allows students to improve their language abilities in an enjoy-

able way. In addition, students develop their abilities to learn autonomously, to work as part of a team, to create and carry out a plan of action, and to confidently speak in public. These are all necessary abilities for your students to become not only global citizens, but also leaders in the global community. If you have any questions or want to know more, please don't hesitate to contact me.

### References

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