Global issues for the EFL classroom

Robert H. Taferner
Lancaster University

Hitomi Sakamoto
Toyo Gakuen University

Anthony C. Torbert
Kobe Gakuin University

Mark Wright
Doshisha University

Jennifer Yphantides
Kanda University of International Studies

For the fourth consecutive year, the Global Issues and Language Education Special Interest Group (GILE SIG) sponsored a Forum at the JALT2010 Conference, where mini-presentations on a variety of current global topics were held. These presentations allowed for close interaction among the participants which facilitated an exchange of lesson plans and resources, as well as a deep sense of our commitment to the EFL profession and the educational needs of our students. Furthermore, the GILE SIG Forum provided the opportunity for experienced and novice educators to collaborate on projects that enhance classroom practices centered both on local and global issues.

今年で4回目を迎えたグローバル問題研究部会(GILE SIG)フォーラムでは、現在注目されている様々な世界の問題について小発表が行われた。この発表により、参加者全員が緊密に交流できた。教案、教材の情報交換はもちろんのこと、外国語としての英語を教授するという仕事、とりわけ学生や生徒の教育にとって重要な意味を持つ事柄全般に深くかかわる使命感についても意見を交わす場となった。さらに、このフォーラムを通じて、グローバルな問題から地域特有の問題に至るまで、それを扱う授業の質を高めることをめざした諸々のプロジェクトにおいて、ベテラン教師と経験の浅い教師が協同する機会を提供できたことも有意義であった。

THIS PAPER reports on the Forum presented at the JALT 2010 Conference by the Global Issues and Language Education Special Interest Group (GILE SIG) under the coordination of Naoko Harada. One of our main aims was to address the needs of teachers attending the Forum who often look for new ideas and materials covering global issues they can easily implement in their classes. With this in mind the presenters, comprising the five authors listed here, as well as Mark Shrosbree and Matthew Walsh, attempted to design lessons that were easily accessible to teachers with multiple pedagogical objectives. These presentations employed readily available multimedia to support the teaching of grassroots issues and exploration of authentic content-based approaches that promote international understanding.

Starting at the grassroots—Following the path of Wangari Maathai introduced the work of Maathai as a role model for how students throughout the world can learn to use simple ideas to make positive changes in their local conditions, and to provide participants with opportunities to learn more about how they and their students can contribute at the grassroots level to enrich their communities.

The syllabus and lesson plans of project-based learning on global issues such as peace and environment were presented in *Project-based learning on global issues based on English lessons of Eigo Note*. Useful teaching materials including picture books and paper theaters for young learners of English were demonstrated.

Teaching food security to young people outlined a lesson plan that introduced students to the concept of sustainability. An illustrative example of the resources required to prepare the average meal was followed by interactive exercises designed to help students explore the resources necessary for their daily activities and to make those activities more sustainable.

Content-based instruction through commodities employed crude oil, an international trade commodity, to exemplify how to create engaging lessons based on a commodity. Teaching students about a commodity with which they are familiar opens the way for dealing with important global issues such as: history, geography, economics, politics, war, and environmental issues.

Promoting student interest in global issues through research and discussion of authentic texts examined the role that authentic reading materials can play in portraying global issues in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Examples of both teacher and student created materials may be implemented in the classroom, to demonstrate how students can work collaboratively towards understanding global issues through fruitful discussion.

Starting at the grassroots—Following the path of Wangari Maathai
Robert H. Taferner

I see a lot of hope, and I see a lot of encouragement.
We must do our best to give an opportunity to all our children
because we don't know which one of them will be the best endowed.
(Maathai in Pipkin, 2006)

Using Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai as a role model, students can learn how relatively simple ideas can make a positive change to both global and local conditions in which we live. This article will demonstrate the feasibility of using role models such as Wangari Maathai to create an EFL lesson to stimulate students' engagement in important global and local issues. For this lesson, 1st-year university students (twenty-five female and six male) with intermediate level English language proficiency majoring in social studies in the Tokyo area were asked what they thought were the most important global and local issues, and what they could do to help solve these problems.

In order to facilitate students' responses about the issues they were most concerned about, a lesson was created using the video-clip: *Wangari Maathai & the Green Belt Movement* available at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm0Fov0U-Nw&p=353FA0DAD0EB458B>. This lesson spanned two classes requiring a total of 90 minutes: 45 minutes in the first class to consider global issues, and 45 minutes in the second class to focus on local issues.

Procedure Class 1

1. Students are introduced to Wangari Maathai allowing for student input regarding Maathai's background and impact on world issues.

2. To prepare students for the video, the following previewing questions are asked:
   i. What are some important issues in the world today?
   ii. How can you help improve these problems?

3. Students then watch the video and share their observations (in small groups of 3-4 people) about Wangari Maathai's concerns for 10 minutes. Here students add their responses to the two questions above.

4. Students then consider what they think the most important global issue is and then write it on the front board to share with the class.

5. Students then complete a survey (see Appendix 1 Survey 1), adding the topics from the front board. The survey asks students to categorize the importance of each issue and what they could do about the problem.

6. Students then share their responses to the survey for 15 minutes in a group discussion.

7. To facilitate the group discussions the instructor encourages the exchange of ideas as he/she walks around the classroom.

Procedure Class 2

8. In the following class, the global topics discussed in the previous class are reviewed and the topic of local issues is introduced.

9. Students consider what local issues are most important to them in groups.

10. Students then share what they think is the most important local issue by writing their responses on the front board.

11. As in the first class, students complete the local issues survey (see Appendix 1 Survey 2) that emphasizes the 4Rs (recycle, reduce, reuse, and repair) and then share their ideas in groups.

12. To consolidate students' thoughts on the issues, a student from each group summarizes the main points their group discussed and the actions they propose are important to help solve some of the issues.

Summary of students' responses

During the Class 2 lesson, students were asked about what local issues they were most concerned about through group discussions and surveys that tabulated their responses on a 5-point scale from very important to not important, and wrote open-ended responses indicating what they think they could do to help solve problems related to local issues (see Appendix 1 Survey 2). The tabulated results from the surveys revealed that a number of social, environmental, economic, political, and educational issues are of primary importance. Within the social issues category, child abuse, suicide, depression, and bullying stood out as the most prominent. These were followed by environmental concerns over pollution, weather patterns, and environmental sustainability. These students also felt anxious about their future employment opportunities, as economic forecasts continue to predict a very competitive job market for university graduates.

At first, these students felt their ability to affect solutions to the problems listed above seemed unapproachable. After students were given some time to consider solutions to these issues during this lesson, they were able to provide insight into what could be done to help society around them. A common response

from the students for helping people with depression and to curtail incidents of bullying was for everyone to be friendlier, listen more carefully to the thoughts of others, and be more accepting of individuals around them. They also suggested that counseling services be more readily available for families to limit stress and engender harmony amongst family members. To improve environmental conditions, all students agreed that a 4R approach could easily be incorporated into their daily lives with very little inconvenience. A good example of a local individual making an impact on the reduction of pollution is through recycling plastic products back into oil for reuse (Smith, 2010). Here a simple idea is likely to stimulate others into individual action that is likely to lead to significant global and local improvements in the environment.

With regard to the economy and their prospects for future employment, most students indicated that government and businesses should solve these problems. Also, a number of students believed that they should work harder in their university studies to be more competitive with other job candidates. These students also felt that more money should be spent to support local businesses. In terms of political and educational concerns, students felt more accountability is necessary for a general improvement in Japanese society. In addition, many students indicated that they did not understand how international and domestic policies directly affected their lives, and desired a broader educational background that could help them engage in political discourse.

Conclusion

Through this lesson initiated by following the work of Wangari Maathai, students have enhanced their awareness of important local issues and thought about realistic actions they could take to make their own contributions to society at the grassroots level.

Project-based learning on global issues based on English lessons of *Eigo Note*
Hitomi Sakamoto

The objective of this presentation was to illustrate how to incorporate global issues into *Eigo Note* English lessons, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2009)**.** Although most Japanese elementary schools use *Eigo Note* for their English classes, Machida (2010) contends that many teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with this textbook as they feel that its content is too superficial. Therefore it is likely that if we add a global dimension to *Eigo Note* and introduce project-based learning, we could enrich its content and develop students' attitudes, skills and knowledge for international communication as students would also be encouraged to research on a global issue that can deepen their knowledge about the world along with learning language.

To illustrate project-based learning using *Eigo Note1,* I used *Lesson 9: Let's Make a Lunch Menu!* This topic is fun and familiar to children, and provides teachers with opportunities to introduce global education. By thinking about how food reaches them, students may feel and appreciate their essential connection to the world as global citizens. To accomplish this objective I constructed a lesson plan composed of three stages.

In Stage 1, students brainstorm what food comes from overseas and learn the new vocabulary for this subject. The target sentence is, "The chicken is from Brazil." At the end of the class, the teacher tells students to bring a supermarket advertisement which shows some food from a foreign country to the next class.

In Stage 2, students deepen their study. The target sentences are, "The chicken is from Brazil. I eat chicken with rice for lunch." The teacher puts the world map on the board. Each

student comes to the front with his/her cut out advertisement of a supermarket, says the model sentences, puts the advertisement on the world map and colors the country. At the end of the class, the poster of food from around the world is completed. The teacher then tells students to go to a supermarket and find where their favorite food is from and do research on where the food is made, how it is made and by whom it is made using the Internet or other sources. For example, if students learn what is happening in Indonesia in order to export lots of shrimp to Japan, they may notice the inequality between developed and developing countries.

The final stage is presentation. The teacher divides the class into groups, and each group prepares for their presentation in either English or Japanese. One idea that was quite successful included a presentation storyboard (*kamishibai*). In this case, the presenters described the situation of an Indonesian family who cannot eat as much seafood as they used to because of the destruction of mangrove forests to make artificial ponds to raise shrimp.

In summary, by structuring English lessons to take shape as project work based on global issues similar to the lessons described in this article, we have the opportunity to inspire children's imaginations and creativity utilizing *Eigo Note* to foster communication skills necessary as global citizens.

Teaching food security to young people
Jennifer Yphantides

In their paper on Global Education, Jacobs and Cates (1999) note that many teachers are uneasy about presenting bad news in the classroom. However, topics like world hunger do not necessarily have to be a depressing experience for our students. Rather, they may actually be positive and empowering.

Over the past five years, I have taught advanced level high school and university students about food security in the Japanese and global contexts. Food security can be simply defined as a sufficient supply of nutritious food accessible to all people. To be sure, many problems stand in the way of establishing and maintaining food security in any context, but the approach is to explore the issue by looking at the situation in Japan. One way teachers can do this is by setting up project work for students. They are assigned to investigate local food production, the challenges faced by food producers, troubles with imported food, and then think about ways to improve food security through changes in shopping habits and daily diet. The results of their research can be reported in small groups.

Once students have been introduced to the concept of food security and studied the local situation, they can move on to other regions of the world. To build a broad view of the situation, students work in groups, where each group is responsible for studying and presenting the food security situation in a particular country or region of their choice.

Because students may have difficulty making connections between their lifestyle and the global food security situation, teachers can ask students what they might do to improve food security in other regions from their home setting. Some students

may choose to research issues such as genetically modified food and seeds. These topics can be used as a springboard to connect to other topics such as human rights and ownership of nature. Fair trade and product awareness also pose important issues. Some countries that face the greatest problems with food security spend much of their manpower and agricultural resources producing crops for export to the lucrative markets of developed countries. Crops raised for this purpose include sugarcane, cocoa and coffee beans. As students become aware that their purchasing choices and diet choices affect not only local but global food security, they may feel more empowered when making decisions about what to purchase and consume.

Teachers need not feel overwhelmed by such topics. Higher level students should take responsibility for researching their topics and teaching other members of the class about their findings. However, if teachers have not taught about food security before, they may want to look at the website <www.facingthefuture.org>. This website provides free resources to budding global educators free of charge.

Content-based instruction through commodities
Anthony C. Torbert

The English language courses provided to university students often include *content* as well as *language* objectives. Unfortunately, much of the content has little connection to issues that arise in other sources such as news or their Japanese courses.

This paper describes a Content-based Instruction (CBI) approach using the topic of world market commodities as the content for English language classes. This topic includes content that can be directly related to students' lives, providing a reference point for their learning (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989), offering personal connections to the subject matter, and reinforcing the likelihood of retention. Engaging topics allow students to develop unique and innovative approaches when creating reports that can be shared with fellow classmates, instead of mechanically repeating memorized facts learned about a textbook topic. Krashen (1982) speaks of ESL instruction focused on meaning rather than form, and CBI lends itself to this strategy for communicating messages and information. A CBI course could revolve around a single theme (Davies, 2003), for example oil, or it could be structured more broadly so it encompasses a variety of related commodities (e.g., energy sources such as natural gas, uranium, or coal).

Students, as participants in the economic system, can be asked to consider what products they consume for familiar commodities such as petroleum, coffee or gold (i.e., the three most widely traded commodities). Even if the student is not a direct consumer of the end product, examples of the product can be found nearby. Understanding the origin of commodities and how they are traded on the world market generates topics for class discussion.

For upper intermediate and advanced level students, conducting the research in English may be appropriate. For students for whom this approach might be too challenging, the work can be done in Japanese. The presentation (e.g., poster, PowerPoint, or website) can be prepared in English using graphs and charts that are readily available for all commodities.

While it is true that a commodities approach lends itself to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes, business and economics in particular, a wide range of more general topics are also available: history, geography, trade routes, major exporters/importers, gender issues, and environmental impact.

Based on the level of the learner, the instructor will need to scaffold projects, providing vocabulary and pointing to source material. For learners with a low level of proficiency it may be beneficial to provide background information in their first language in order to assure comprehension of the subject matter. Finally, it is important to stress to lower level students that as they will be presenting to their classmates, it is important to focus on comprehensible output rather than prepare a high level paper for the instructor to evaluate.

In a nutshell, the steps for a 3-4 class presentation project are as follows:

Class 1

1. Teacher decides on a medium for the project
2. Teacher (or students by voting) can select a commodity category, for example: grains (rice, corn, wheat) or metals (silver, gold, aluminum)
3. Students brainstorm and teacher makes suggestions on which aspects to focus on (economics, geography, history etc.)

Homework

4. Students do research on a particular topic, either in Japanese or English

5. Students prepare an English outline of their research

Class 2

6. Teacher (and peers) give feedback on outline

Homework

7. Students improve outline and prepare a presentation draft

Class 3

8. Teacher gives feedback on presentation draft

Homework

9. Students prepare a poster or PowerPoint

Class 4

10. Presentation day. Students listening take notes or complete a feedback form.

Creating an interesting course that deals with real world problems can serve as an effective and motivating way to get students involved. Content-based instruction using commodities, as long as the content is level appropriate, can lead students to broaden their own knowledge and give them material for meaningful communication in the English classroom.

Promoting student interest in global issues through research and discussion of authentic texts
Mark Wright

This article demonstrates how Internet articles can help to enliven an English language class. In my university communication classes for 1st and 2nd year students, I introduce the notion of thinking more globally about current issues by asking students to explore and discuss articles readily available on the Internet.

While taking only 45 minutes, the activity described below allows the teacher to supplement a text, or to implement their own materials. Four-week themes include such topics as: endangered species, rainforests, global warming, human rights, and gender issues

Procedure

1. Groups of four people are organised during the previous week. One member from each group is assigned as leader and instructed to locate an Internet article of around 300 words, and prepare to share it with other members of the group the following week.
2. To facilitate sharing with the group, the leader transfers the text into a Word document that is attached to the Communication Article Worksheet A4 template (Appendix 2). The Worksheet lists discussion questions, key points and key words. A copy of the Worksheet is made for each group member and Instructor.
3. In class, group leaders distribute their articles to the other members of their group. Students are allocated 20 minutes to read the article and make notes on any key words or

points they may not understand. Blanks are intentionally left on the Worksheet, it is during this time that students fill in these spaces with their own answers and original question, to later bring to the discussion table.

4. During the next 20 minutes, the group leader guides students through the article, covering the key words, key points, and discussion questions, and gauging the group's opinion about the suitability of the article with regard to reliability and freedom from bias. The criteria for the latter part will need to be modelled beforehand by the instructor with examples of good and bad articles, so the students can remain on task.
5. The Instructor, meanwhile, moves around the classroom monitoring the group discussions.

The advantages in using authentic internet-based materials in this technique are numerous. Rather than being handed materials by the teacher, students have some input and choice over what they would like to study, producing a "sense of achievement" as students feel more stimulated to share what they have found (Martinez, 2002, p. 1). It also helps students to practice their research skills. As suggested by Spelleri (2002, p. 16), "[e]xposure to authentic language means that prediction skills will be honed and that learners will improve their strategies for dealing with uncertainty." The process allows students to practice reading and discussion skills in a collaborative environment, and once they "get into the groove," they enjoy this activity immensely.

Conclusions from the Forum

Robert H. Taferner

This year's GILE SIG Forum allowed participants to communicate their beliefs about current global issues and prepare for future challenges in the language classroom.

The common thread that links the sections of this article is the desire for teachers to have their students take the initiative in their own learning through content-based topics. The themes that arose during the conference included: the promotion of grassroots movements, peace, environment, food security, international commodity trading, and banning the ivory trade. Successful classroom innovation of content-based lessons was achieved through fostering a combination of students' imaginations, opinions, and research skills.

In order to meet the multiple pedagogical objectives of the Forum, the presenters designed lessons that could be easily adaptable to a variety of classroom settings. Robert Taferner demonstrated that using a well-known international role model stimulates interest in important global and local issues. Through this lesson students crafted realistic actions they could take to make their own contributions to society at the grassroots level. Hitomi Sakamoto's project-based lesson provided insight on how readily available classroom textbooks can be utilized to inspire young learners to foster their communication skills while reporting their finding on a wide variety of important issues. Jennifer Yphantides developed an approach to teach content-based lessons supporting independent learning and the sharing of knowledge to improve students' confidence when discussing global issues. Anthony Torbert used content-based instruction through commodities to illustrate that lessons dealing with real world problems is an effective and motivating way to get students involved in meaningful communication in the classroom.

To conclude, Mark Wright stimulated student interest in authentic internet-based materials and covered global issues by applying independent research techniques. This approach produced a sense of achievement through researching and discussing topics in a collaborative learning environment.

Since many EFL students have very limited contact with people outside their own society, they rely on sources of information they trust to truthfully inform them about the world. Thus, as educators, our presence in the classroom can help facilitate students' appreciation of other cultures, languages, and thoughts. In the EFL classroom, it is important that we provide students with a variety of issues for them to be aware of so they may, one day, be able to contribute in their own way to improving the world around them.

Bio data

Robert Taferner has been teaching English in Japan since 1993. He holds a MAT-TESOL from the School for International Training and is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University, UK. His research interests include materials development and student motivation. <robert_taferner@yahoo.ca>

Hitomi Sakamoto teaches at Toyo Gakuen University. Her research interests include global education in EFL classes and teaching English to children.

Anthony C. Torbert is on the Business Faculty at Kobe Gakuin University. He teaches Business English, Western and Non-western Culture and Global Issues classes. His research interests include connecting economics with ecology and social justice.

Mark Wright lectures both at Doshisha University and Ritsumeikan University. His research interests include second language acquisition, bilingual education and learner autonomy.

Jennifer Yphantides works at Kanda University where she teaches Academic Reading and Peace Education.

Resources

- A copy of the *Nobelity* DVD can be obtained at: <www.nobelityinschools.org>
- The Nobelity Project Film Library is available at: <www.nobelity.org/video.html>
- To watch the Introduction to Nobelity go to: <www.linktv.org/programs/nobelity>
- The Green Belt Movement: <www.greenbeltmovement.org>
- Commodity prices: <money.cnn.com/data/commodities> & <www.commodityonline.com>
- Fair Trade: <www.fairtrade.org.uk>; <www.transfairusa.org>; & <www.fairtrade-jp.org>

References

Brinton, D. M., Snow, M. A., & Wesche, M. B. (1989). Content-based second language instruction. New York: Newbury House Publishers.

Davies, S. (2003). Content-based instruction in EFL contexts. *The Internet TESL Journal, IX*(2). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Davies-CBI.html>.

Jacobs, G. M., & Cates, K. (1999). Global education in second language teaching. *KATA, 1*(1), 44-56.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. London: Pergamon.

Machida, J. (2010). *Thematic English lessons at elementary schools*. Tokyo: Sanyusha.

Martinez, A. G. (2002). Authentic materials: An overview. *Karen's linguistic issues*. Retrieved from <www3.telus.net/linguisticissues/authenticmaterials.html>.

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2009). *Eigo note 1, 2*. Tokyo: Kyoiku Shuppan.

Pipkin, T. (Director). (2006). *Nobelity* [Motion picture]. United States of America: The Nobelity Project.

Smith, C. (2010, August 26). Plastic to oil fantastic. *OurWorld 2.0*. Retrieved from <ourworld.unu.edu/en/plastic-to-oil-fantastic>.

Spelleri, M. (2002). From lessons to life: Authentic materials bridge the gap. *ESL Magazine 5*(2), 16-18. Retrieved from www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED472794.pdf

Appendix 1

Survey 1: Starting at the Grassroots—Following the Path of Wangari Maathai

Global Issues	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Little importance	Not important	What can you do to help solve this problem?
1.						
2-13.						
14.						
Other:						

Survey 2: Starting at the Grassroots—Following the Path of Wangari Maathai

Local Issues	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Little importance	Not important	What can you do to help solve this problem?
1.						
2-13.						
14.						
Other:						
Provide examples of the following:						
Recycling						
Reducing						
Reusing						
Repairing						

Appendix 2

Communication Article Worksheet

Name: _____

- **Article Title:** STOP ELEPHANT POACHING: Ban the Ivory Trade
- **Author:** Stephanie
- **URL:** http://www.peachygreen.com/wildlife/stop-elephant-poaching-ban-ivory-trade
- **Date of Article:** 27/08/2009

KEY WORDS (Vocabulary / Part of Speech / Meaning) [Leave 2 blank]

1. Slaughter – (v.) to kill
2. Score – (n.) a group of 20
3. Poaching – (v.) catch game (wild animals) illegallyBarbaric – (adj.) cruel / uncivilized
4. Tusks – (n.) enlarged tooth
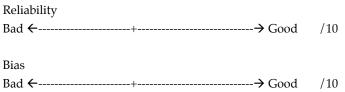5. Vendors – (n.) seller, someone who sells something
6. _____
7. _____

KEY POINTS (Three points. One Sentence each.) [Leave 1 blank]

1. The prices for the rare commodity are astounding: poachers can be rewarded with as much as $3000 per kilogram of ivory on the black market.
2. Most of the money from the legal sale of ivory does not help the residents of African nations, instead it is the middlemen who are getting rich.

3. _____
   _____
   _____

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Questions only – No Answers) [Leave 1 Blank]

1. Why do you think the Elephants are still being slaughtered despite the ban? _____
   _____
   _____

2. Why was it necessary for CITES to partially to lift the ban for some countries? Do you think this is a good idea?
   _____
   _____

3. Traditionally ivory was popular in Japan, do you know why? What can Japan now do to help this problem?
   _____
   _____
   _____

RATING THE SOURCE

Reliability

Bad ←--------------------+--------------------------→ Good   /10

Bias

Bad ←--------------------+--------------------------→ Good   /10