

Growth and Learning Through Poster Presentations: Global Education and Language Development

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This paper explores a global education approach to EFL instruction in one Japanese university, which fosters learners' English communication skills while they work together on poster presentations about social and environmental issues. Encouraging students to discuss global issues topics and report on fieldwork activities they had already researched during their Japanese seminar classes appears to motivate students to *re-produce* similar content for their English poster presentations. Informal survey findings suggest that content-based projects actively assist students to acquire the language, skills, and knowledge necessary to confidently communicate their ideas and opinions about social issues, to think critically, and to develop as world citizens.

本稿は、社会・環境問題に関わるポスタープレゼンテーションの共同準備作業を通じ、学習者の英語コミュニケーションスキル向上を目指した、ある日本の大学で実践されるグローバル教育的視点にたった英語教育について論ずる。日本語で行われるゼミですでに調査した地球規模問題について議論し、フィールドワーク活動についての報告を促すことにより、学習者たちは同様な内容を英語のポスタープロジェクトで再現することに意欲を見せた。非公式に行なったアンケート調査結果は、このようなContent-basedプロジェクトは、学習者たちが社会問題について自信を持って自分の考えや意見を伝えるのに必要な言語／スキル／能力の獲得やクリティカルな思考を促し、世界市民の育成に役立つことを示唆している。

Adopting a Global Education Approach to Language Development

The foreign language classroom can be viewed as an appropriate context for global education (Cates, 1990; Osler & Starkey, 2005), helping learners connect classroom tasks with real life and providing rich subject material for meaning-focussed communication (Maley, 1992). Firstly, as language and culture are inextricably linked, EFL teachers must enable learners to develop not only their linguistic skills, but also their intercultural communicative competence, which derives in part from knowledge of and respect for cultural and social diversity in the world (Byram, 1997; Morgan, 2010a). Secondly, learning about global issues and different world views while communicating in English (or another foreign language) can actually assist uptake of language forms, vocabulary, and structures (Cates, p. 45). Furthermore, when teachers expose their Japanese EFL learners to the concept of English as an International Language (EIL), students may feel their English study has relevance beyond the classroom. This understanding of EIL helps shift ownership of the language to include the language learners (not just the native-speaker teacher) (Widdowson, 1994), which may increase learner motivation. Finally, in an increasingly globalised world, universities everywhere have expanded their educational objec-



tives to include not just the provision of academic knowledge, but also the development of their students as *world citizens*.

This paper will describe how one university teacher used global issues topics in learner poster presentations to help students consciously connect their learning experiences in their Japanese (L1) seminar courses to topics covered in their English (L2) classes. By recycling in the English language classroom content related to international and domestic social change agencies and NPOs, along with students' own fieldwork experiences, the learners became more engaged and able to achieve language tasks such as research projects and oral poster presentations. Through task-based lesson cycles and repeated oral presentations, students felt they developed not only as fluent speakers about their chosen topic but also as active participants in discussions about various important social issues in the world today.

Poster Presentations in Language Classrooms

The L2 poster sessions outlined below have learners orally presenting information on large format posters (e.g., 550mm x 800mm) that include the following items: a large title, four to five pictures/ diagrams with brief captions and topic information in keywords (not a full speech). The poster itself provides a speaking prompt for students' oral production and a visual aid for the audience; the poster scaffolds the authentic communicative activity for students of diverse levels (Shrosbree, 2010). Poster presentations can provide learners with rich opportunities for multiple skills development (Jost, 2005; Shrosbree). Oral presentations are an authentic speaking and listening activity where the speaker and audience have an opportunity to interact and process language and information in real time. There can also be a strong writing component when students write abstracts, speeches, or short reports for the teacher to edit and then assess. Moreover, students read and carry out research about their topics using the Internet or primary source data. Students

learn to collect, organise, and prioritise information; these are transferable skills for life-long learning.

Additionally, in group work students develop skills related to social interactivity and learner autonomy (Murphey & Jacobs, 2000). They must negotiate with partners to plan and assign project tasks, and to meet deadlines. They have to collaborate critically to organise their information and pictures, and to create their poster. Such skills of team work, problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication about serious world issues all usefully contribute to learners being better equipped to think about social/ global problems and to express themselves in English with greater freedom and self-confidence (Nakamura, 2002). Oral fluency development is specifically targeted through task repetition during poster carousel sessions when students are *simultaneously* presenting and listening. By repeating presentations to three or more different audiences, learners have chances to improve their oral performance at each new turn; the teacher can evaluate their final and best performance. The poster carousel format incorporates the fluency development features of *focus on meaning, repetition, preparation, time pressure, and familiarity with language and content* (Nation, 1991).

Methodology

Participants

As a classroom language teacher, the author carried out action research over two years in her freshman, sophomore, and senior Speaking-Listening classes which met once a week over a 15-week semester. The target group of International Communication major students comprised 18-21 year olds, fairly evenly split between females and males. At the start of the new academic year, freshman and sophomore language levels ranged from false-beginner to pre-intermediate level English according to the university's placement test. Senior classes included study-

abroad returnees with higher English proficiency. Along with English language classes, International Communication major students also study in-depth global issues topics within various L1 seminar courses. These seminar courses include topics such as *Globalisation and Civil Society*, *Intercultural Relations*, and *Cultural Anthropology and East Africa*. As part of these L1 courses, students participate in experiential learning projects such as setting up a *Fairtrade Café* on campus in 2011 to educate the student body about *Fairtrade* issues and products, in particular coffee. Students might also join 10-day field trips to India, Africa, and East Timor, where they work with non-profit volunteer organisations (NPOs) who are working to solve local social problems such as child labour and street children rehabilitation. On these field trips, students acquired global issues content knowledge and primary source experience in their L1. Moreover, they practised discussion and debating skills, and critical thinking in an L1 setting.

Similarly, these students are eligible to participate in the Meisei Summer School Project (MSSP), where they work in teaching teams with international volunteers to prepare and deliver English lessons to young learners from local schools. This task-based English-teaching project gives students opportunities to improve their English linguistic proficiency as well as their intercultural and cross-cultural competence. As a result of either volunteer fieldwork or participation in MSSP, many previously demotivated students demonstrated increased agency and motivation for English learning (Fukada, 2009) and university study overall, along with enhanced interest in global issues and culture topics (Morgan, 2010b). Naturally, they wanted to bring these topics and experiences into their English classes.

Poster presentations and group research projects are usually timetabled at midpoint and near semester's end. Topics reflect textbook themes to give students the opportunity to recycle language and content already studied in both English language

and Japanese seminar classes. Additionally, students are directly encouraged to choose themes related to their L1 global issues seminars and fieldwork experiences.

Data Collection

The teacher kept anecdotal records over two years (2009-2010) during the poster project cycles in order to assess the range of topics chosen (popularity), and learner output (fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, content). Various data collection methods were employed such as a teacher's diary for postclass reflections; learner self-evaluation forms were collected after the presentations on seven occasions, and the teacher made summary notes from these; student poster samples and written artifacts (speeches and cue cards) were monitored throughout. In addition, the teacher also communicated with Japanese professors about their course content, the university fieldwork programs, and the students who were attending both Japanese global issues classes and English language classes. At the end of 2009 and 2010, the author conducted an informal survey (Appendix A) about poster presentations, speaking skills, and global issues topics in her classes. Students were asked to reflect on 1) the poster presentation task and whether they found it a useful way to improve their speaking confidence and 2) whether they enjoyed the global issues focus of the language task (the poster presentation).

Background Observations

Many of the students were unconfident and demotivated learners, perhaps as a result of poor language learning histories at high school; many students also demonstrated narrow world knowledge that resulted in difficulty during productive tasks in their English classes. A lot of time was needed for learners to retrieve vocabulary, generate content, formulate opinions, and speak flu-

ently about any topic at length. All students tended to rely strongly on written notes when required to speak in class, whether giving simple feedback after an activity or for a longer presentation project. Additionally, most students were simply unable to talk quickly or at length on many topics, particularly on common world issues topics (environment, poverty, war, racism, gender issues). Two of the learning goals for the university's Speaking-Listening courses are 1) to develop learner's oral fluency and 2) to develop general knowledge of global issues. The teacher's implicit goal is also to increase student motivation and engagement in classroom learning by providing enjoyable, interesting tasks (Ellis, 1994).

Classroom Implementation

Task-Based Lesson Cycle

The teacher adopted a task-based approach (Ellis, 2006), where learners practised the four skills during the task cycle. Even though the poster presentation task focuses on speaking, learners will clearly get practise over the four skills while communicating about world-issues topics. Students are also acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes to help them understand global problems and ultimately take action about them (Cates, 1990). The following poster project lesson cycle (focusing on diverse themes) has been used for 3 years now with high levels of learner engagement, enjoyment, and language output.

Pre-Task Phase

Students variously work alone, in pairs, or in groups planning their posters. Firstly, they practise speaking, listening, and writing when carrying out a classroom survey about volunteering and voluntary organisations. Next, they write notes as they collate their findings and brainstorm ideas in groups. Then they focus on reading when they do a matching task— they have to

match well-known Japanese and international volunteer organisations with global problems and solutions. After the survey and matching task, learners choose their research topic—a specific NPO and its related social / environmental problem. Lastly, they must read, paraphrase, and write while collecting research information about the causes, effects, and solutions to a specific global problem. Learners must research information to provide a description and history of their NPO and the problem-solving activities that the organisation is carrying out. Students receive a list of eight websites which provide Japanese and English information about various NPOs that are working on global issues about which the class already knows something.

The target task is modelled using past student samples or the teacher's example poster about the Red Cross so students clearly understand their goal. When students carry out the above communicative tasks, they review and recycle known language and ideas. This familiarity with language and content, along with rehearsal, can contribute to increased fluency when learners deliver their presentations. During the preparation lessons, groups are assigned, worksheets are provided to guide Internet research, and presentation guidelines (with assessment criteria, deadlines, homework tasks) are explained. Specifically, the teacher and students together read through a simple assessment rubric which will be used by the teacher to grade the learners' speaking performances. The descriptors in the rubric cover the information that students should try to include in their presentations, the target language they should aim to use, and other oral presentations skills such as body language, eye contact, and voice clarity. Having transparent evaluation criteria aims to empower students to strive for their best performance.

Finally, students work on constructing their posters which is a creative and collaborative process and which offers another opportunity for languaging about content, thus increasing topic familiarity.

Task Performance Phase

In this phase, learners review presentation language (Shrosbree, 2010), rehearse their speeches with posters and summary note cards, and any audience listening tasks are explained. The teacher might prepare listener note-taking tables for completion, or question prompts, which are appropriate to the class level and current learning goals. Such tasks encourage active listening and authentic interaction between interlocutors.

The during-task phase needs to be managed well by the teacher in terms of time limits, classroom dynamics, and arrangement. Poster presentation sessions are usually dynamic, energised, noisy, learner-centred communicative events where all participants are involved in meaning-making. Students therefore need to be clear about their roles and constraints during poster carousels. In a poster carousel, half the class is speakers who are stationed by their posters that are displayed around the classroom walls. The other half of the class is listeners who visit several poster stations and listen and interact in a more natural fashion to the various presenters within a given time frame. At the end of each presentation or as directed by the teacher, the listeners move along to the next presenter. Speakers might deliver their speech 2-4 times before the whole class changes roles. As concurrent presentations are taking place, carousels make great use of class-time and student-on-task time.

During the poster presentation project, students teach their peers about real fieldwork experiences, transformative learning experiences, and English communication opportunities with NPOs in India, Zanzibar, and Mexico. The classroom becomes a collaborative learning environment, where both teacher and students become co-learners (Murphey & Jacobs, 2000). All classes are required to carry out Internet research in pairs, write a speech, design a poster, and deliver an oral presentation. The projects are 20% of their final grade.

The Post-Task Phase

Learners are encouraged to practise reflection, self-evaluation, or peer evaluation by completing comment slips with positive comments and questions for the presenters. For example, some classes cast best poster votes, write post-it positive comments on posters, and complete self-evaluation forms. Reflection on the task process, task performance, and future improvements helps students develop metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and evaluation (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Peer evaluation encourages a more student-centred classroom, develops learner reflective skills, and hands some control for assessment back to the students. The teacher usually gives immediate general feedback on task performance (positive comments, tips for future improvement), which is followed up with individual written assessment in the next class.

Assessment

Poster presentations offer students a fair means of assessment of their language skills and work done. Teachers can schedule poster projects at the end of a cycle—completing a textbook unit, or at midpoint or end of a term. Student poster sessions also provide summative evaluation of work done, content learnt, language skills acquired, and should reflect the textbook content and syllabus objectives. Students are able to produce their best performance after they have had time and support to prepare information, practise skills, and give repeat presentations. Both teacher and peers can observe the best performance and offer comments and feedback to inform students' final grades for presentations. Features of both fluency and accuracy can be evaluated using a transparent speaking rubric, along with a grade for group participation/effort and goal achievement. It is important for the class and teacher to read through the assessment criteria together so learners know what the task goals are.

The teacher needs to have prepared a user-friendly marking rubric to check while moving about the classroom monitoring and assessing multiple concurrent presentations.

In terms of content assessment, in the learner self-evaluation forms and later in the survey (Morgan, 2010b) students assessed themselves as being more aware of local and global social issues problems and events than they were before the poster presentation classes. Similarly, some students felt better able to communicate difficult concepts such as cause and effect, giving advice, offering solutions to problems, and expressing opinions as a result of their poster presentations. Others now felt “excited to talk about global issues,” “interested to know about world problems,” and felt better able to “say my opinions more strongly now because I learnt much information about (child labour)”.

Discussion

Task-based lesson cycles and oral poster presentations have helped the author’s previously unconfident students develop their speaking fluency in line with Nation’s (1991) fluency development criteria and expand their global knowledge. Firstly, regarding fluency development, learners focus on meaning in the pre-task survey, the reading-matching task, and later during the presentations. Secondly, they repeat the task, so there is plenty of speaking output in the poster carousel format. Importantly, students choose their own specific topic in pairs/groups, which is motivating, and there is ample time for preparation of content and language so they are dealing with easy, familiar material when they present.

Secondly, students are engaging deeply with world issues topics; many are recycling content knowledge from their global issues L1 seminar courses, helping them link their learning across L1 and L2 classrooms. All classes showed much more motivation than usual to prepare materials; design creative, use-

ful posters; and communicate information to their classmates. Freshmen self-selected topics included recycling in Japan, child labour, endangered animals, poverty and war in Rwanda, and global-warming solutions. Sophomores researched NPOs and social change agencies such as Greenpeace, Fairtrade, and Amnesty International. Senior classes prepared presentations on cross-cultural learning and reflections, immigrants in Japan, and war and conflict resolution.

Task outcomes and assessment criteria are designed to suit the class level, so learning goals are achievable but challenging. Time limits are imposed whether semi-controlled for the carousel or in controlled decreasing intervals as in the 4-3-2-minute speech activity (Nation, 1991). Finally, learners practice formulaic presentation language and so are more able to take control of their audience, poster, and message.

During 2009-2010, a total of 83 students were asked to answer an informal bilingual questionnaire about their poster projects (Appendix A). The aim was to get learners to reflect on and notice how and whether poster sessions were useful for language learning, and to gather feedback to inform future classroom assessment tasks and topics. Students were also asked to reflect and comment specifically on the carousel activity. Learner responses to global issues poster projects were positive overall (Morgan, 2010b).

Firstly, from the survey responses (Q.1-4) it appears that students were initially very challenged by the carousel activity, but many felt they could ultimately speak “faster, more smoothly (with) less stopping to think (about) my ideas”. Each time students do oral task repetition activities they certainly seem to get better at them, developing speaking fluency, speed, clarity, and confidence. Students commented that the repetition aspect of the carousel presentation task was beneficial to their confidence and speaking ability:

I think I feel more confident about speaking in front of class... keywords helped me remember my ideas. Actually, I could remember almost information at the final time. I could just look at my partner and speak about Fairtrade's ideas.

I had to speak faster each time, I tried to relax and just say my ideas...not care the mistakes. I felt more relaxed each time I gave my speech.

Carousel was fun, better, because the partners were really listening to my speech...we could kinda chat more easily about my poster.

Secondly, there was evidence that most students felt that the global issues focus was relevant and interesting (Q.5-9):

Poster project was fun and benefited me because I could explain information about world topics from my zemi's (seminar) class.

I could learn about world's problems... my partner taught me about child labour's fieldwork...maybe I'll join next year.

We should have more projects like this about other world affairs in this class. We're going to send goods (books and stationery) to Laos NPO soon.

We could grow up more when we worked with the (India) street children...so I wanted to tell my classmates about these issues.

Finally, learners enjoyed aspects of the poster project such as conducting research, planning information, group work, and developing confidence about speaking to an audience. More than half felt more confident expressing their opinions about world issues (Q. 7, 8). They shared personally transformative experi-

ences and improvement in English proficiency from their fieldwork abroad. A few were motivated to continue their research in their Japanese seminar class and think more deeply than before about global issues and join on-campus volunteer activities (Q. 6). A few senior students are actively seeking employment after graduation with international NPOs. Undoubtedly, this is more likely as a result of the class work and activities carried out in Japanese seminar classes, but hopefully such students have also benefitted from having opportunities to express themselves freely in English about global issues and to work collaboratively on related projects inside their English classes, too.

Conclusion

The inclusion of global education and global issues in university EFL classrooms actively encourages students to acquire target language skills and knowledge necessary to communicate ideas and opinions about social issues, to think critically, and develop as world citizens. A global education approach encompasses not just content, but also skills and attitudes that lead to taking action about global/social problems. English language teachers can give their students opportunities to develop L2 communication skills and world knowledge through task-based activities such as poster presentations or projects. Although speaking fluency is a significant goal in this activity, poster presentations also offer rich opportunities for development across the four skills while learners of all levels participate in task-based group work. Furthermore, poster projects are student-centered, allowing for more meaningful communication and often providing opportunities for practical extra-linguistic skill building.

When timetabled thoughtfully throughout a language syllabus, poster presentations can become a highlight in the classroom learning community. Poster topics which complement or reflect content that students are studying in their other university courses can engage and motivate them to explore

subjects more deeply. Here, interdepartmental communication and collaboration between foreign guest lecturers of English and Japanese content professors can inform the focus of English classes to some extent and benefit students who attend our courses. When students have opportunities to draw on their extracurricular experiences and choose their own topics, they are able to personalize their learning process and final product. With clear assessment criteria, the oral presentation is a tangible achievement goal in which students can showcase their linguistic, creative, and academic skills. In all these ways poster presentations about global issues topics are an effective means for language learners to develop their language fluency. Moreover, they can enhance students' ability to fully engage with relevant social issues as active world citizens contributing to their own self-realization and the progress and improvement of the society in which they live.

Bio Data

Jennifer Morgan is a guest lecturer in Meisei University's International Studies Department. She has taught English in the UK, China, New Zealand, and Japan. Her current research interests include writing portfolios, global education, materials for multi-level classes, and project-based learning.

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Appendix A

Student Survey About Poster Presentations and Global Issues Topics (adapted with permission from Nakamura, 2002).

1. Do you feel more confident about public speaking in English through poster presentation projects?
2. Do you think you can communicate your ideas better from doing these kinds of poster presentations?
3. Did you notice any change in your speaking speed or confidence during the poster carousel activity?
4. Which topics have you enjoyed researching and speaking about this semester? Name 2-3 topics.
5. Do you think you have become more aware of social and global issues from this class?
6. Do you want to participate in an NGO/NPO, or do volunteer work to help people in developing countries, or to help protect the environment?
7. Do you think the urge to express your opinions and ideas about global issues had become stronger than before this course?
8. Do you think that social/global awareness and confidence about expressing your opinion in public will be helpful in your future life? How / why?
9. Do you think it is important to learn about human rights and global issues in an English class? Why / why not?