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## Introducing a Global Issues Curriculum at the High School Level

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### Introduction

One year ago, the administrators at my high school asked the four native speaker English teachers (NSETs) to implement a global issues curriculum for the second year oral communication class. The administrators wanted the NSETs to link global themes that students studied in their first year social studies class to content in the new English curriculum. I embraced the idea enthusiastically for two reasons. The first was that the NSETs were dissatisfied with the curriculum at that time because it focused on the development of linguistic skills, with little regard for content. As Cates (1990) states, a global issues curriculum aims to enhance students' linguistic skills while also providing them with the knowledge and skills required to deal with world problems. Secondly, the third year oral communication class consisted of a curriculum on environmental issues, so I thought the new global issues curriculum would serve as a natural bridge to the third year class. The obvious link between the two courses fueled our motivation to begin the planning process.

The NSETs devised a global issues curriculum consisting of four components: *Poverty & Wealth, Food & Water, Human Rights, and Peace Education*. The aim of our curriculum was to present a breadth of global issues to students rather than depth in each component for, as Brinton (1989) has shown, a global issues content-based curriculum is one that teaches students about the world. The curriculum at our school narrows that focus to concentrate on Asia.



The purpose of my project was to assess the students' attitudes to the new curriculum. I wanted to know if students enjoyed studying global issues and at the same time whether students perceived they were able to improve their linguistic skills while studying a content-based curriculum. A content-based curriculum tries to strike a balance between imparting substantial content and encouraging linguistic development. Secondly, I wanted to ascertain if studying global issues causes students to be more enthusiastic to continue learning English.

Global issues can be serious and gloomy. It is a challenge to teach about conflict, famine, poverty and discrimination without the classroom atmosphere becoming heavy and the students depressed. One of the keys to maintaining a positive attitude towards the class is to focus on solutions to the problems.

This project has also provided us with feedback. The NSETs have been able to assess the success of the new curriculum and consider changes based on the feedback. If students embraced a global issues curriculum, it may encourage other teachers and high schools to implement similar courses. As global issues is still a relatively new field of study in Japan, a positive response by students would add momentum to its growth.

There are certain limits to listening to student opinions. Students may reject content that is challenging if they fail to see its applicability to their lives or futures. Students may also not realize how much their language proficiency has actually improved over the course of study, especially when the pedagogic focus is on understanding and discussing ideas, rather than focusing primarily on communicating with grammatical accuracy. Nevertheless, student input is a valuable source of feedback and worthy of consideration when evaluating a curriculum's success.

In this paper I argue that students in this study found global issues interesting and that they perceived they were able to develop their English language skills while studying these issues. Studying global issues made students more enthusiastic to continue learning English. Although students found studying a content-based curriculum challenging, they believed that learning about other countries and cultures enhances their understanding of



the world. Students also thought studying global issues will be of practical benefit to them in the future when they begin to prepare for university entrance examinations.

## **Literature Review**

### *Content-Based Instruction*

Proponents of content-based instruction argue that language is most effectively learned in the context of relevant and meaningful content. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) define content-based instruction (CBI) as “the integration of particular content with language-teaching aims” (p. 2). The activities in a CBI class are centred around the content being taught and students are expected to learn the content by using the target language. According to Eskey (1997), the rationale for employing CBI is that “people do not learn language and then use it, [rather] people learn languages by using them” (p. 133). Eskey argues that content is “not merely something to practice language with: rather, language is something to explore content with” (p. 136). Da Silva (2000) identifies content as a crucial part of language learning and the separation of language from content as both arbitrary and artificial.

Parmenter (2000) sees content-based learning as contributing not only to language but also to students’ wider education by broadening their horizons. CBI’s broader educational perspective is essential to prepare students for an increasingly interdependent world, and Hosoya (2000) and Kazuya (2000) show that incorporating foreign language classes with global education will enable students to develop global perspectives to deal with a future characterized by change.

Parmenter (2000) also links affective aspects to content-based learning such as enjoyment, confidence and increased motivation. In terms of content, she exposed her students to a wide range of topics, including international business, foreign travel, and the environment. She found that the focus on content rather than language helped her students to stop worrying about making mistakes and start enjoying English. Her students began to form opinions about society and express their opinions confidently. Research has shown that content-based courses increased student motivation for studying English and raised students’ confidence when using English (Han & Dickey, 2001; Parmenter,



2000). However, Parmenter (2000) admits that the link between enjoyment and CBI is not automatic and can be combined with frustration as students realize the limitations of their language skills. Students may grasp the content but have difficulty putting their thoughts into English and communicating their ideas.

O'Dowd (2000) reported that students in content courses exhibited greater than usual interest in the courses and engaged in the classes with enthusiasm. Johnson and Higgins (2000) found that students performed at a higher level when they believed the content they were learning was relevant to their present and/or future needs.

### *Curriculum Design*

There are a number of factors to be considered before designing a content-based curriculum. Cates (1990) advocates a global issues curriculum accompanied by the four goals of knowledge, skills, concern and action. He believes these skills will help to ensure our students become socially responsible citizens. Knowledge refers to teaching awareness of global problems. Skills to be taught include communication skills, critical and creative thinking, empathy, multiple perspectives, co-operative problem solving and informed decision-making. Concern entails developing positive feelings about changing the world's condition. Action obviously refers to doing something to alleviate a problem. Content must be chosen judiciously because "it is impossible to teach learners everything they need to know in class" (Nunan, 1988, p. 3). Hosoya (2000) believes the choice of content can be made more effectively through cooperation between social studies and foreign language teachers.

Mackenzie (2000) contends that content is the dimension that fuels course design and the desired learner outcomes will dictate linguistic choices the curriculum developers have to make. O'Dowd (2000) argues for integrating the four traditional language skills into the curriculum. He stresses that assessment and evaluation procedures must be determined from the beginning of the course and made explicit to students. Brinton (1989) points out that a language syllabus must take into account the eventual uses the learner will make of the target language.



Curriculum developers decide on an appropriate balance between substantive content and linguistic aims. Poole and McCasland (2000) for example claim the ideal balance is 20 percent language instruction and 80 percent content instruction. Dusthimer (1996) says curriculum developers need to link content, thinking skills and learning styles. Yamashiro (1996) says training in critical thinking skills is essential in a content-based curriculum as students need to understand different points of view before making decisions or taking action.

Research suggests that in successful CBI, teachers use realia and authentic text materials to increase student interest and motivation (Brinton, 1989; Hosoya, 2000; O'Dowd, 2000). However, authentic materials will likely need to be altered to bring a course to students' ability level because as Sato (2000) warns, most students are likely to be overwhelmed by global issues vocabulary because the words are so unfamiliar. However, according to Kasper (1997), as students grapple with authentic texts, they become aware of how to construct meaning from information stored in memory, and filter out redundant or irrelevant information. Rosengren (1983) suggests the most effective materials are ones teachers design themselves and tailor to meet the interests and needs of their students.

### *Global Issues*

CBI and global issues are tied to teaching style. On the one hand, making connections deepens the relevance of language education. On the other, CBI is difficult to implement. The declaration on International Education by UNESCO (1974) states that human rights, environment, development and peace issues should be taught across the curriculum and Kazuya (2000) urges English teachers in Japan to address these global issues. Cates (1990) talks about teachers' moral responsibility to care about global problems. He says the Japanese Ministry of Education (1983) also has adopted a curriculum model and "encourages teachers to develop courses that train students to have a deep sense of responsibility, contribute to world peace and the welfare of mankind" (p. 121).

UNESCO (1974) advocates a participatory approach of learning and suggests learner-centered ways of teaching. Hosoya (2000) concurs with UNESCO, pointing out



that “not only the content but also the method of global education should be considered carefully” (p. 57). There is much consensus among global educators, such as Brinton, (1989), and Pike and Selby (1988), that the role of teacher should be that of facilitator. To assume the role of facilitator, teachers must shed the traditional role of authoritarian and adopt the role of global learner with the students. Facilitating involves loosening the reigns of the class, encouraging the students to ask questions and viewing learning as a process with no fixed destination. Fisher and Hicks (1985) warn that if teachers assume the role of *knower*, students will fail to develop their enquiry skills.

Before a global education program can be successfully implemented, Kniep (1987) says teachers need clear statements of what global education is and why it is important. The implementation of global issues programs is impeded, according to Mische (1987), because there is a lack of widespread agreement on the definition, purposes and objectives of global education.

### **Methodology**

I designed a study combining both qualitative and quantitative features to determine how students felt about studying global issues and if they perceived they were making progress with their English linguistic skills while studying a content-based curriculum. The means used to accumulate data included two questionnaires, oral interviews, my teacher’s journal, written feedback from students and one class observation by a colleague. The study was conducted over a three-month period.

### *Setting and Participants*

The context of the study was a private girls’ junior & senior high school in eastern Japan. All 34 of the students enrolled in the second year high school oral communication course. Over the course of the study, students completed two questionnaires soliciting opinions about studying global issues. They were also asked to assess their linguistic progress. Oral communication is mandatory until first year of high school, so this course was an



elective for all students. They had previously studied oral communication at the school with NSETs once a week.

The second year oral communication program consisted of three classes of students designated by homerooms. The students rotated from one component of global issues to another each term so students studied three of the four components. Only my *Peace Education* class was offered in all three rotations. The students did not get to choose the content of their study. The head foreign teacher randomly assigned each class to a course schedule.

### *The Four Components*

The global issues curriculum consisted of four components. The *Poverty & Wealth* component began by having the students define the terms poverty and wealth. The students learned how the cycle of poverty is perpetuated by choices of consumption. They also studied fair trade and labor issues, and they discussed squatter settlements. The core activity of the class required students to design their own Non Governmental Organization (NGO) whose mission was to alleviate poverty. After, students wrote, rehearsed and recorded a public service announcement for their NGO. In their public service announcements they cited reasons for poverty and offered solutions to eliminate it.

In the *Food & Water* component, a connection was drawn between fast food and obesity. Students learned how raising cattle to supply fast food restaurants in First World nations affects people in developing countries. Students also examined chronic hunger and famine, and their own consumption patterns.

Given the all-female population of the student body (but especially to heighten interest in its content), the *Human Rights* component focused on women's issues with a more specific focus on Japan and Asia. The component began with the introduction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then shifted to issues prevalent in Asia, including the sex industry and trafficking of women and children. The students did a case study on Maiti Nepal, an organization whose workers attempt to rescue women from forced prostitution. They also explored issues relevant to Japanese society, such as sexual



harassment and domestic violence. Finally, students conducted Internet-based research on the topic, “The Woman I Admire Most.”

The fourth and final component of the curriculum was *Peace Education* which I designed and taught. The aim of the *Peace Education* unit was for students to develop a greater understanding of the causes and effects of conflict in their own lives, with a particular focus on Asia. The students learned to analyze root causes of conflicts, and propose strategies for peaceful solutions. Activities in this component included group brainstorming on the meaning of peace, discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an information gap activity using maps of Asian nations, and an exercise adapted from Peaty (1997) in which students tried to view Japanese culture through the eyes of resident foreigners. The unit culminated in a project in which the students worked together in groups to conduct Internet research on areas of conflict throughout Asia. In the last class, each group presented its research to the class, and proposed solutions to the conflict which the group had researched.

#### *Data Collection*

I designed and administered two questionnaires completed by all 34 students in the course (see Appendix A). The first questionnaire I and the other NSETs conducted in the first class of the third term. The students completed the questionnaire during class time. The other NSETs and I explained the questionnaire to our students and waited outside our respective classes while the students completed them. I did not want the NSET in the classrooms while students were completing the questionnaires lest we influence their answers. The questionnaire was written in both English and Japanese to ensure comprehension. A Japanese teacher was available in case students wished to ask any questions in Japanese. Following Dörnyei’s (2003) model, I piloted the questionnaire to three third year students, including one returnee. I asked them to check for ambiguity. The students approved the content and assured me that second year students would understand it.





The questionnaire was multi-faceted, consisting of Likert-scale questions and open-response questions. Students had a choice of answering questions in either English or Japanese.

The Likert scale questions asked students to consider whether the global issues classes had made them enthusiastic to continue studying English and to what degree they understood the two components they had studied. I also asked the students to gauge how much their four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing had improved since studying global issues. The students had six choices: *not sure, very little, a little, some, much* and *very much*.

One open-response question asked students to name as many Asian countries as they could. Another question asked students what they liked and disliked about studying global issues. I had students write a short response explaining what they remembered about what they had studied. Finally, students could write other comments they wished to make about the global issues program. The closed-response questions asked if students would take the elective oral communication class the following year and whether the global issues classes they had studied this year had influenced their decision.

The second questionnaire was administered three months later during the final class (see Appendix B). I could not spare class time to allow students to complete the survey at school, so I asked them to complete it at home and gave them two weeks to do so. The students had time in class to peruse the questionnaire and ask questions about it. I followed the same piloting procedure as the first questionnaire.

The second questionnaire was similar to the first one. Employing the same scale, students were asked to what extent global issues had made them more enthusiastic to study English and how interesting global issues was for them. I asked how useful the information learned during the year would be in the future. I also asked students to evaluate the level of difficulty of each of the three curricula they had studied. I used a similar scale, ranging from *very easy* to *very difficult*.

I asked students to circle the language skill they had hoped would improve the most during the year and I had them rank the four skills in order of how they perceived



them to have actually improved. Using an open-response question, I asked the students to explain their answers. The remaining questions on the second questionnaire were identical to the first.

Other sources of data I collected included my teacher's journal. I took notes in every class of salient features, such as laughter, body language, engagement, and use of English and Japanese. Immediately following the class I referred to my notes and indexed them following Hubbard and Power's model (1993).

Shortly before administering the second questionnaire, I conducted 12 oral interviews with students. I randomly chose four students from each class. I explained to the students the purpose of the interview and all students complied willingly. A week in advance, I gave each student a list of the four questions which I planned to ask. The students' Japanese English teacher checked my questions before I gave them to the students and suggested that I make modifications with the language and use simpler or more familiar words.

In an attempt to establish an atmosphere of cooperation, I sat side by side with my students while I interviewed them, a technique used by Nunan (1993). As Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993) suggest, I interviewed two students simultaneously hoping students would feel more at ease. I asked students to tell me one thing they enjoyed studying in the global issues classes and something they did not. I asked students if they would take oral communication the following year and if the current year's course had influenced their decision. I also asked students three questions they had not prepared for:

1. Which of the four language skills have you improved the most and why?
2. Which language skill have you improved the least?
3. What skill would you most like to improve this year and why?

I wanted to obtain written feedback from a sample of my students so I asked them to answer questions I wrote on the board at the end of the second class. I asked students to tell me what they remembered and liked about the lesson. I also asked students what they wanted to know more about. I gave students five minutes to write as much as they could and asked them not to stop writing until time was up. In subsequent classes, I asked



students to answer the questions and gave no time restriction. Students never wrote for more than five minutes.

At the end of the following class, I asked students to give me written feedback assessing how much English they perceived themselves to have spoken in class that day. I also asked students to tell me what I could do to increase their speaking opportunities. Lastly, they had to tell me what they did and did not understand in the class.

The third time I collected written feedback, I asked students to state which activity they had enjoyed the most in that lesson. I also asked which language skill students felt they had used the most, and the least, in that lesson. The fourth time I sought feedback, I asked students to write what they liked and/or disliked about the lesson.

I asked another NSET at my school to conduct a classroom observation of one of my classes. I asked him to note how engaged the students appeared to be on the task, the ratio of the use of English and Japanese, and the situations when students resorted to Japanese. The NSET attended the class for 30 minutes and took written notes.

#### *Analytic Procedures*

After collecting the questionnaires, I tabulated, coded and analyzed the responses. I used the Likert-like scale responses to provide a representation of each class and the whole program. For the open-response questions, I transcribed responses and created categories, identifying patterns and similarities. Since some of the students chose to write some or all of their answers in Japanese, I asked a Japanese English teacher to translate their responses. To check accuracy, I asked another Japanese colleague to review the translations. She suggested minor changes in word choice which I then negotiated with both Japanese teachers.

The process of coding began by identifying recurring words and phrases. After reviewing the data repeatedly, I identified a group of six categories: *broadening horizons*, *Food & Water*, *interesting*, *useful*, *serious*, and *difficult*.

After completing the oral interviews, I listened to the recordings to get an overview after which I listened a second time and made notes. I then selected sections



relevant to the research questions and I transcribed those fully, following Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993).

**Findings**

Results of the first questionnaire show that the majority of students felt the new global issues curriculum had made them more enthusiastic to continue studying English. Of the 33 students I surveyed, 28 (85%) said studying global issues had raised their enthusiasm to continue studying English and 15 indicated they were a lot or very much more enthusiastic. Only 15% of students (5 of 33) said their enthusiasm had increased little or very little. The second questionnaire, administered three months after the first, produced slightly more favorable results. The number of students who said they were a lot or very much more enthusiastic to continue studying English rose from 15 to 19 while only 12% of students (4 of 34) said their enthusiasm had increased just marginally (see Table A).

**Table A**

<i>To what extent have the global issues classes you have studied made you more enthusiastic to continue studying English?</i>							
	<b>not sure</b>	<b>very little</b>	<b>a little</b>	<b>some</b>	<b>a lot</b>	<b>very much</b>	<b>Total # Students</b>
<b>Nov</b>	0	2	3	13	12	3	33
	0	6.06%	9.09%	39.39%	36.36%	9.09%	100%
<b>Feb</b>	0	1	3	11	17	2	34
	0	2.94%	8.82%	32.35%	50%	5.88%	100%

The enthusiasm for the global issues curriculum was also evident in the number of students who indicated they will continue to study oral communication in the third year class. In the previous year, only 31% of second year students (16 of 52) joined the third year oral communication class. Following the study, 65% of students (22 of 34) indicated they would carry on with oral communication. The large increase of student enrolment may indicate that students are enthusiastic about global issues, as Student A affirmed, “I want to know more about global issues.” Further support for global issues is shown by the fact that of the 22 students continuing with oral communication, 68% said the global issues



curriculum had a positive influence on their decision. Of the 12 students not continuing with oral communication, only one said studying global issues had negatively influenced her decision.

Student enthusiasm for global issues was also evident to another NEST when he observed my class. He wrote after the class that the students “appeared to be interested in the subject matter and doing the pair-work quite actively.” I noted in my teacher’s journal after the same class that “students appeared to be having fun.” I based my impression on students’ body language. I recorded that one student clapped when I acknowledged her answer to be correct. Another student pumped her arm in delight when her partner said, “I agree,” confirming their answers to be identical.

Of the eight entries I recorded in my teacher’s journal, I identified demonstrations of student enthusiasm in five classes. After my class on February 10, I wrote that “the students seemed to be engaged enthusiastically during all activities.” Observing student interaction in an information gap using maps, I recorded that “they were laughing a lot.” During another activity I wrote, “Students seemed to enjoy the challenge of deciding which flag belonged to each country.” I noted that one group cheered when I said their answer was correct and I heard another student say “*kore tanoshii*” (“This is fun”) during the same activity.

The first questionnaire showed that 70% of students said that studying global issues was interesting or very interesting, and on the second questionnaire this percentage jumped to 85%. The 15% increase shows that students became even more interested in global issues after a further 12 weeks of study. Only 2 students indicated studying global issues was not interesting on the first questionnaire and this number dropped to zero on the second survey (see Table B). On the first questionnaire more than a third of the students (39%) answered that there was nothing they disliked about studying global issues. This percentage rose to 44% on the second questionnaire.



**Table B**

<i>How interesting do you think global issues is?</i>							
	not sure	not interesting	a little interesting	somewhat interesting	interesting	very interesting	Total # Ss
Nov	0	2	3	5	15	8	33
	0	6.06%	9.09%	15.15%	45.45%	24.24%	100%
Feb	0	0	3	2	16	13	34
	0	0	8.82%	5.88%	47.05%	38.23%	100%

As well as saying that global issues was interesting, students also overwhelmingly endorsed the global issues curriculum as being useful to their futures. A large majority of students (85%) said they thought the information learned would be quite or very useful to them. Student B wrote that the curriculum was useful because it expanded her knowledge, “I could know many things which I didn’t know.” Student C viewed the global issues content she was studying as useful because “the class deals with the problems of today.” When interviewed, Student D alluded to practical benefits of the global issues curriculum saying, “It can be help for the university entrance exam.” None of the students said the new curriculum was not useful.

*Entrance Examinations*

Of the nine students whom I surveyed about whether they thought the course would help them prepare for university entrance examinations, six answered affirmatively and the other three students were unsure. Two of the students who answered affirmatively said global issue themes are included on entrance examinations and two other students stressed they believed the content of the curriculum was important. One student said her vocabulary had increased and another said her knowledge had expanded, “My thinking and opinion about global issues made deeper. My knowledge of the world problems are more than before.” However, other students, including Student E, were uncertain if studying global issues was beneficial in a practical sense saying, “This lesson is good for us but it may be useless in college examinations.” My Japanese English teaching colleague advised me that some students had not begun to prepare for entrance examinations so their ability to assess the usefulness of the curriculum would be difficult at that time. Student F offered



this comment on her questionnaire: “I wish your lessons would have been more useful for the entrance exams; for example, some articles with important content or words of high frequency” [original in Japanese]. Student F was the only student who explicitly perceived the global issues curriculum as not being useful for her entrance exam preparations.

### *Broadening Horizons*

Within the endorsement for studying global issues, a third of the students made comments that suggested their vision and understanding of the world had deepened. Student G said, “My thinking and opinion about global issues made deeper and my knowledge of the world problem is more than before.” I found that students initially had not known a lot about other Asian countries or global problems. Student H confirmed my impression. She said she enjoyed studying global issues because her “vision of the world has been widened to learn the present global issues” [original in Japanese]. Student I said she liked studying global issues because she could “know about many countries problems or culture in English.” She also added that “What was rewarding is to have learned about conflicts and religions of the world, which made me interested in other countries.” Comments like these indicated that some individuals broadened their horizons by learning about other countries through English.

### *Global Issues Content*

Students most enjoyed studying global issues when they could relate to the content of the curriculum. Seven students specifically said they could easily identify with the content in the *Food & Water* class. Student J explained that she “liked the topic of fast food, because it was familiar.” Student K reinforced the remark saying she liked the theme because food is the “nearest” issue to her. Student L concurred when she said the theme was most enjoyable because it was familiar and easy to think about. Food and water are commodities students consume every day so they could easily visualize those items and understand their necessity.



Students least enjoyed studying global issues when they deemed the content as abstract or irrelevant to their lives. Student M complained the *Peace Education* class was “too abstract” while Student N said the class “felt a little far for me.” Student O said she wanted to “study a concrete thing.” To maintain student interest in global issues, it’s important to be able to convey the connection between far away conflicts and students’ immediate lives. Therefore, it seems I was not always successful in engaging all students in the global issues content.

Many students indicated they had learned and remembered content from the curriculum. Students also made comments indicating their attitudes towards life had changed. Student P said her appreciation of food and water had been heightened: “I thought we [should] treasure resources because there is many people who don’t have water for even wash their body and face.” Student Q learned that “more understanding each other” was necessary to create a more peaceful world. Other students said studying global issues had stimulated their thinking. Student R said studying about NGOs had started her “thinking of global problems.” Student S claimed that learning about conflicts and religion in the *Peace Education* class had made her “interested in other countries.”

### *Negative Views*

On both questionnaires a few students had complaints about specific classes but most negative comments were about the study of global issues in general. Some students said the content was too serious. Student T said, “As the topic was very serious, the class atmosphere tended to be gloomy” [original in Japanese]. Student U thought the class length was too long and not conducive to serious content. She said, “Since the topic was serious, it was hard to concentrate for two periods” [original in Japanese].

Some students did not like the feeling of hopelessness that some classes gave them. Students felt they could do nothing to alleviate the world’s problems. Student V said she disliked not being able to know or “think about this problem’s solution.” Student W said, “I want to learn more about how can we solve those problems.” Student X said the thing she disliked about studying global issues was that “the global problem is very heavy so I





can't imagine what can I do for them." One student stated she would like to do some fund raising to alleviate a global problem and another said she would like to volunteer at a charity agency but a feeling of pessimism dominated over her altruistic aims, saying, "These problems are very serious issue in our world. I think 'What can I do?' many times. It is so difficult issue that I thought many things. I'll try to volunteer."

Global issues teachers must stress that problems are solvable to ensure students will be motivated to take action. Therefore, with these students, I was unsuccessful in showing that the problems were solvable and the feeling of helplessness seemed to subdue their motivation to act. Another common complaint about the curriculum was that the content was too difficult. The questionnaire revealed that the four components of the curriculum were not understood to the same degree. Students said overwhelmingly (91%) they understood the issue of *Food & Water*. A slightly smaller percentage, but still a large majority (74%) said they understood the *Peace Education* class well. More than half (60%) of the students believed they had a greater understanding of the *Poverty/Wealth* issue and half the students said they understood the *Gender Issues* class well.

One student said she disliked global issues because "there are some difficult words." Students were presented with a lot of new vocabulary in each component of the curriculum. Six students found the vocabulary overwhelming.

The *Peace Education* class was considered the most difficult of the four components. When asked to assess the level of the difficulty for each component of the curriculum, 18 students said *Peace Education* was "a little difficult" but only 7 of the 34 students said the same about *Food & Water*, *Poverty & Wealth* and *Gender Issues*. On the second questionnaire *Peace Education* was the class most listed as a reason for disliking global issues. One student wrote, "This issue is so difficult." Another student said she disliked the *Peace Education* class because of the vocabulary, saying, "The words and content was a little difficult." When I interviewed Student W and asked what she disliked about global issues, she told me that the *Peace Education* class was difficult saying, "Global issues were very complicated so it was a little difficult for me to think many



countries' conflicts or religion." Sometimes students had to read authentic materials on the internet and nine of them found the research process difficult.

Although some students complained that the curriculum was too difficult, other students said the curriculum was tolerable. Students were still able to enjoy studying global issues despite the challenging content. One student said, "It was very difficult for me. But I could learn many global issues so it was interesting." Another student commented:

I thought I could have understood the global issues more easily since I had already learned them in social studies class, but it was more difficult than I thought. I tried very hard because not only the contents but English itself was difficult, but I felt I was able to learn all the more for that hurdle.

My data suggests that students liked the material in class to be challenging and are usually willing to persevere if they find the content interesting. Learning occurs when students are able to overcome initial difficulties. My teacher's journal provided an example of students persevering and enjoying difficult content. In one class I presented the song "Feed the World" as a cloze exercise. After the class I wrote this summary in my journal:

The song was difficult for them but they got some of the answers. I asked students if they wanted to hear the song a second time and they said 'yes.' One student then asked to see the answers and requested I play the song a third time so they could listen while they read the lyrics. A few students left the room singing 'Feed the World.'

This student reaction indicates that challenging tasks can be enjoyable and students are able to learn by overcoming initial difficulties.

### *Student Suggestions*

Other students made suggestions about how the content could be made easier, particularly by using videos. One student wrote, "I want to watch more pictures and video." Other students suggested how vocabulary could be made less difficult. One student proposed that "this program has many difficult words, so I want to look up in the dictionary before class." Another student suggested that she would sometimes "like the difficult words to be paraphrased to follow the explanation" [original in Japanese].



Some students suggested that a system of separation according to English ability be adopted for the global issues class. One student complained that if she had been “able to speak English more” the class would have been more fun.” The student felt that the curriculum “seemed to be geared to the excellent students” and felt left out [original in Japanese]. At the school, students are separated into three levels according to their English ability for instruction with the Japanese English teachers. Oral communication classes, of which the *Peace Education* class was a part, are multi-leveled.

### *English Language Skills*

The first questionnaire results showed that reading was the linguistic skill that students thought had improved the most since the course began. About half the students said their reading (48%) and listening skills (45%) had significantly improved since studying global issues. Twelve students (36%) perceived their speaking ability had improved while only 8 of 33 students (24%) believed their writing had improved much.

On the second questionnaire 23 students (67%) wrote that speaking was the language skill they had hoped would improve the most while studying global issues. However, 13 students perceived listening as the language skill most improved, followed by speaking (8 students) writing (3 students) and reading (2 students). The skill most students considered the least improved was writing (13 students) followed by reading (6 students), speaking (5 students) and listening (1 student). The reason most cited for the improvement in listening was that the class was conducted exclusively in English and the students had more time to speak and listen to their friends in English. Student X’s reply summed up the feelings of many students when she stated, “In oral communication class, teacher always speaks in English and I have a chance to listen my friend’s English so it became practice listening. There was little chance to write.” Student V said her listening skills had improved the most during the course and that she was happy because there will likely be a listening component on some future entrance test examinations or *Eiken*, the standardized English test given in Japan.



## **Discussion**

In my project, I have addressed the issue of implementing a global issues curriculum at the high school level. I found that most students enjoyed learning about global issues and most perceived they were simultaneously developing their English language skills while learning about world problems. While I had hoped the students would embrace the new global issues curriculum, I was surprised that so many students felt their lives had been enriched. The findings suggest that my students thought global issues were interesting, especially if they could connect the content to their own lives. Students were also enthusiastic about studying global issues and they believed the information they learned would be useful in the future, possibly even helping them on university entrance exams.

Sometimes, however, students found studying global issues to be difficult because they had to concentrate on English and grapple with a content-based curriculum. Despite efforts to adapt the material to the level of the classes, students said the content was difficult. The global issues curriculum contained many new words and some students felt overwhelmed, while other students said they liked that their vocabulary had expanded. Such a discrepancy will certainly make designing a similar curriculum in the future a challenge, as I want to present new and challenging content, yet avoid discouraging students with an abundance of vocabulary. A few students complained that some content was abstract and not always significant to their lives. However, student suggestions to present issues more clearly by using videos and pictures could be used to make global issues more real and concrete in future classes.

Some students found the global issues curriculum to be an abrupt shift from their previous experiences of studying oral communication. The students had studied oral communication for four years and had received little exposure to global issues content in those classes. Suddenly, students were presented with a completely different kind of learning approach and with a classroom atmosphere that was markedly more serious. However, most students made a smooth transition to content-based instruction, learning content and simultaneously developing their English language skills. It was especially gratifying to learn that many students felt studying global issues had widened their



perspective of the world. Students became interested in global issues and enthusiastic to learn more about other countries and cultures.

When teaching global issues, it does not suffice to merely present content and inform students of problems. It is essential to stress that problems are solvable, if students are to act to find solutions. Unfortunately, some students could envision no solutions to world problems and felt helpless to improve the situation. In the future I would like to encourage student action either collectively or individually. Collective action will consist of class projects to raise money for a global problem or students volunteering their time for a worthy cause. Even simple actions such as giving to charity or writing a letter to an embassy could lead to positive changes by allowing students to develop greater social responsibility. Students felt they alone could not act to initiate positive changes but as Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (Cates, 1990, p. 5).

Before starting the project, I had hoped that students would perceive that their speaking skills had improved the most while studying global issues. Speaking was the skill the teachers had wanted to provide most opportunities for practice, and was the language skill the majority of students most desired to improve. However, students complained there were few opportunities for speaking practice or that the serious content made it difficult to discuss global issues in English. Student feedback requires me to reflect on my teaching practice and consider if in fact I am doing what I think am in the classroom. In the future, the NSETs will reassess their lessons to ensure ample opportunities are provided for speaking practice.

Next year, for logistical reasons, the NSETs will combine the *Food & Water* component of the global issues curriculum with the unit on *Poverty & Wealth* in hopes that learner awareness of the interconnectedness of the components will rise. Implementing the global issues curriculum has given me a more acute understanding of the value of content-based instruction where students are given the opportunity to engage with world problems. While I need to recognize the constraints that students face and perhaps check



the effectiveness of the curriculum, the project has given me encouragement to make connections between language learning and global issues.



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**Appendix A – Questionnaire #1**

**H2 Global Issues Survey**

1. To what extent has the global issues classes you have studied made you more enthusiastic to continue studying English? (please circle one number)  
 global issues の授業の結果、もっと意欲的に英語の勉強を続けようと思いましたが？

<b>not sure</b>	<b>very little</b>	<b>a little</b>	<b>some</b>	<b>a lot</b>	<b>very much</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

2. How much do you think your four language skills have improved since studying global issues?  
 global issues の授業の結果、以下の英語の 4 技能はどれくらい伸びたと思いますか？

		not sure	very little	a little	some	much	very much
		<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Language Skills	<b>speaking</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>listening</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>reading</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>writing</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

3. Please write as many **Asian** countries as you can on the lines below. Then write the total number of countries you have written in the box. Spelling is not important.  
 下線部にアジアの国名をできるだけ多く書き、その数を BOX に書いて下さい。  
 スペルは間違っても構いません。

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TOTAL # OF COUNTRIES

4. How much more do you think you understand the global issues you have studied this year? Please circle one number for each topic.



授業を受けてから、どれくらい global issues について理解が深まりましたか？  
それぞれのトピックについて、1つ選んで数字に丸をして下さい。

**Gender Issues**

<b>not sure</b>	<b>very little</b>	<b>a little</b>	<b>some</b>	<b>a lot</b>	<b>very much</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

**Poverty Wealth Gap**

<b>not sure</b>	<b>very little</b>	<b>a little</b>	<b>some</b>	<b>a lot</b>	<b>very much</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

5. Do you think studying global issues is: (please circle one number)  
global issues の勉強はおもしろいと思いますか？

<b>not sure</b>	<b>not interesting</b>	<b>a little interesting</b>	<b>somewhat interesting</b>	<b>interesting</b>	<b>very interesting</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

6. Please complete the following 2 sentences.  
次の2つの文を英語で完成させて下さい。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、  
6. と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

One thing I like about studying global issues is... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

One thing I don't like about studying global issues is ... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Are you going to take oral communication next year in H-3? (please circle one)  
来年も H3 で oral communication をとりますか？



**No**                      **Undecided**                      **Yes**

(まだ決めかねている)

8. Please explain the reason for your decision in question #7  
7の答えの理由を英語で説明してください。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、  
8. と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

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9. Has your experience with global issues had an influence on your decision in #7?  
global issues を学んだことが7番の決定に影響しましたか？

**Not sure**                      **No**                      **Yes**

10. Thinking about the global issues you have studied this year, please finish the sentence below by writing as much as you can. I remember and understand . . .  
global issues の授業を振り返って、I remember and understand に続く文章を英語で  
できるだけ多く書いて下さい。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、  
10. と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

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Please use the lines below to write any other comments you have about the H2 global issues program.

H2 の global issues のプログラムについて、他に何かコメントを英語で書いて下さい。

ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、「コメント」として文章を書いて下さい。

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**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**



**Appendix B – Questionnaire #2**

**H2 Global Issues Survey**

1. To what extent have the global issues classes you have studied made you more enthusiastic to continue studying English? (please circle one number)  
 global issues の授業を受けて、もっと意欲的に英語の勉強を続けようと思うようになりましたか？

<b>not sure</b>	<b>very little</b>	<b>a little</b>	<b>some</b>	<b>a lot</b>	<b>very much</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

2. Which of the four language skills did you hope would improve the most this year in the oral communication classes? (please circle one)  
 今年度の oral communication の授業で、4 技能のうちのどれを最も上達させたいと思っていましたか？ (1つ選んで丸をして下さい)

<b>writing</b>	<b>reading</b>	<b>listening</b>	<b>speaking</b>
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3. Which of the four language skills do you think has improved the most since studying global issues? Please write one number (1, 2, 3, 4) beside each skill.  
 global issues を勉強して、4 技能のうちのどれが最も上達したと思いますか？  
 それぞれの技能について、(1, 2, 3, 4) から1つずつ選んで数字を横に書いて下さい。(1, 2, 3, 4) を1回ずつ使い、同じ数字を書かないようにして下さい。

<b>Most improved</b>			<b>Least improved</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>writing</b> __	<b>reading</b> __	<b>listening</b> __	<b>speaking</b> __

4. Please explain the reason for your decision in question # 3  
 3の答えの理由を英語で説明してください。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、  
 4. と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。



5. How difficult were the global issues you studied this year? Please circle one number for each topic.

global issues の勉強は難しかったですか、やさしかったですか？  
それぞれのトピックについて、1つ選んで数字に丸をして下さい。

**Gender Issues**

<b>not sure</b>	<b>very easy</b>	<b>a little easy</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>a little difficult</b>	<b>very difficult</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

**Poverty Wealth Gap**

<b>not sure</b>	<b>very easy</b>	<b>a little easy</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>a little difficult</b>	<b>very difficult</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

**Peace Education**

<b>not sure</b>	<b>very easy</b>	<b>a little easy</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>a little difficult</b>	<b>very difficult</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

6. How interesting do you think global issues is? (please circle one number)

global issues の勉強はおもしろいと思いますか？

<b>not sure</b>	<b>not interesting</b>	<b>a little interesting</b>	<b>somewhat interesting</b>	<b>interesting</b>	<b>very interesting</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

7. How useful to you in the future do you think the information you studied in global issues will be?

global issues の授業で学んだことは、将来あなたの役に立つと思いますか？



<b>not sure</b>	<b>not useful</b>	<b>a little useful</b>	<b>somewhat useful</b>	<b>quite useful</b>	<b>very useful</b>
0	1	2	3	4	5

8. Please complete the following 2 sentences.

次の2つの文を英語で完成させて下さい。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、  
8. と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

One thing I really enjoying studying in the global issues class and I would like to learn more about is . . . \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

One thing I didn't like studying in the global issues classes was . . . \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Are you going to take oral communication next year in H-3? (please circle one)

来年も H 3 で oral communication をとりますか？

**No**

**Yes**

10. Did your experience with global issues have an influence on your decision in #9?

global issues を学んだことが 9 番の決定に影響しましたか？

**No**

**Yes**

Please use the lines below to write any other comments you have about the H2 global issues program.

H2 の global issues のプログラムについて、他に何かコメントを英語で書いて下さい。

ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、「コメント」として文章を書いて下さい。



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**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**  
**ご協力ありがとうございました!**

