GLOBAL STUDIES IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: ISSUES OF STUDENT INTEREST

JOHN ESPOSITO, CHUKYO UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

A syllabus, properly defined, is an outline of the focus and content of a course of study. Curricular focus is determined primarily by course objectives, which ought to reflect educational principles and methods. Content is customarily based on and limited to the theoretical concepts and propositions of an established discipline. In addition, most syllabi contain administrative details, evaluation criteria, and information regarding instructional materials in a way that allows for ease of reading and reference. Some syllabi are also being treated in a quasi- contractual manner binding both instructor and students, as it were, to a prescribed domain of educational interaction. As such, they establish the pedagogical parameters for what can and cannot be taught in a given class.

Global studies is a field of academic inquiry that is neither multidisciplinary nor interdisciplinary but trans-disciplinary; that is, instead of proceeding from the theoretical premises and approaches to problem solving as prescribed by a specific discipline, the emphasis is on far-reaching issues, relationships, and the processes in which they manifest themselves. Its guiding method is to identify global realities, and then seek to apply specific disciplinary perspectives to them. This, of course, presents challenges for syllabi construction in terms of both focus and content. It further raises the question of whose realities will be subject to which perspectives and how students are to critically position themselves.

The following syllabus is an attempt to address these concerns in a manner that incorporates a global mindset into the English as a Foreign Language classroom where content is more often than not of secondary concern (McIntyre, 1996). Classes in second language acquisition usually foster skill development or communicative competency through a variety of approaches grounded in linguistic theory (Richards, 2001). When content is addressed, it is normally used as a vehicle for instruction of a particular skill or competency. Indeed, most second language instructors are not schooled in content-based approaches and lack the training for or interest in placing global issues at the center of the curriculum (Butler, 2005).

In this case, the classroom is one of intermediate level Japanese students studying at a women’s junior college. The cultural homogeneity of the classroom coupled with a similar life-experience, education, and outlook was the impetus for creating a course in which familiar frames of reference would be challenged (see McVeigh, 1997), while building upon second language strengths of reading and translation (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). Moreover, it was thought that the group presentation format would make the intimidating solo oral performance before an audience less daunting. The fact that the information transmitted in the presentations is the basis of a roundtable discussion and end-of-semester review (aka. the final exam) motivates students to not merely listen politely but take an active role in the learning process.
Establishing a student-centered classroom is not without its difficulties given the top-down approach to learning with which Japanese students are accustomed and the fact that females tend to defer to their male counterparts in most academic settings (Ishikida, 2005). The cyclical structure of the course is therefore meant to establish a degree of familiarity. Although the cycle of locating a news report, summarizing and translating it, and making a presentation of the news to class is repeated every two weeks, there is much diversity in terms of content as the students are free to select articles on any topic of interest as long as it concerns women in a country within their designated geographical region. Further, because responsibilities are rotated within each group, every student practices researching, writing, editing, and presenting. This transition from passive to active learner has other potential pitfalls, however. When a group fails to find a suitable article, for example, the instructor needs to provide one. If someone is absent, which is not uncommon, then the student must inform the group in advance so another member can substitute. This is why group members are required to exchange contact information during the second week of class.

While this syllabus is designed for students at an intermediate level of linguistic proficiency, the approach described in detail below obviously lends itself to other settings, where the focus may not be on improving second language skills, but on developing a global mindset or critical perspective on global issues. Instead of dividing the class along geographical lines, for instance, groups can be formed according to academic disciplines. The class can then choose an issue for the presentations, with each group either finding an article or doing research on it from their respective discipline. The purpose of the presentations would be to compare and contrast the ways various disciplines frame certain issues, with particular emphasis on terminology, values, and standards. Such an approach should not only begin to foster a broader view of the issues under discussion, but also motivate students to question the biases and limitations of established ways of knowing. In addition to demonstrating an ability to comprehend the issues, a goal appropriate for students studying a second language, review sessions and journal entries could be used to foster critical thinking skills. The final exam as well might take the form of an essay or presentation concerning a policy proposal designed to address a specific issue.

The following syllabus endeavors to find a middle ground between students’ linguistic needs and their intellectual curiosity about the world in which they live. For an intermediate level class, in fact, the relevant objectives regarding these goals seem to complement each other to a significant degree (Dupuy, 2000). The lessons learned thus far can be gleaned from the comments section of the syllabus. Again, the primary challenge has been one of curricular focus and content—something each instructor interested in adapting this syllabus will ultimately have to decide on along with his or her students.

REFERENCES


SYLLABUS: GLOBAL STUDIES

PURPOSE

The primary aim of this course is to create an awareness of and appreciation for the complex problems that many women in the world face today. While focusing on these issues, students will practice making presentations in English. Secondary aims of this course include improving note-taking, translation, summarizing, and critical thinking skills.

OBJECTIVES

- To create an awareness of women’s global issues
- To practice giving oral presentations
- To improve overall confidence using English

COURSE STRUCTURE

1. The class is divided into groups consisting of three to five members.
2. Each group is assigned to a geographical area of the world.
3. One member (i.e., the researcher) is responsible to search Japanese language newspapers, magazines, or Internet news services in order to find articles about women in countries within their specific area.
4. The researcher brings copies of the article(s) to class. If the researcher fails to bring at least one article, then the group must use an article provided by the teacher, which is selected from an English-language news source. If the researcher brings more than one article, the group should select one and save the other(s) for future consideration.
5. The article selected is summarized in Japanese, translated into English, and the translation is written on the Article Summary Form.
6. The remainder of the class is spent preparing for the following week’s presentations.
7. Reflections (e.g., reactions, questions, ideas) on the content of the article are written in a journal for homework.
8. In the following class, each group makes a presentation, which takes the form of a TV newscast. All presentations are given twice to facilitate speaking and listening comprehension. The presentation should be short and informative while explaining any points the audience may not know.
9. The rest of the class (i.e., the audience) takes notes on the presentations.
10. After the second presentation, the audience is encouraged to ask the presenters questions.

GROUP MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Anchor (makes presentation)
- Media Specialist (creates visual aids)
• Researcher (searches for article)
• Writer (summarizes and translates article)

EVALUATION CRITERIA

• Journals—20%
• Presentations—60%
• Final Exam—20%

CLASS SCHEDULE

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<th>WEEK</th>
<th>CONTENT, HOMEWORK, COMMENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Content: Course introduction; questionnaires; class discussion</td>
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<td>Homework: Read newspaper article about women’s issue in Japan</td>
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<td>Comments: Introduction to course includes explanation of overall design. Students then fill out questionnaires anonymously concerning their knowledge about women’s issues in the world (see Appendix A). The questionnaires serve as the basis of the day’s discussion and provide the instructor with a snapshot of student background knowledge, outlook, and interest.</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Content: Homework article; mock presentation; group formation</td>
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<td>Homework: Search for first article and bring copies to class</td>
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<td>Comments: Students are asked to provide the main points, or what they most recalled, about the article assigned for homework. A list is placed on the board or overhead projector. As a means of comparison, they are provided with a summary of the article as prepared by the instructor, including an explanation of how the summary was written (according to the keyword approach). A mock presentation is then given after which students are permitted to ask the presenter (i.e., instructor) questions. This section of the class concludes with a general discussion of the article, especially the ways in which the topic may relate to the students. Presentation groups are then formed through a lottery, with each student selecting a geographical area (North America, South and Central America, Europe, Middle East and Africa, Central and South Asia, and Asia Pacific). Next, students convene in groups, with the remainder of the period used for getting to know each other and exchanging contact information. Their assignment is to begin the presentation process by designating a researcher to find at least one article about women from any country in their geographical area. Each group is provided with a list of countries, so that there is no overlap between them.</td>
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| **Week 3** | **Content**: Article summary form; suggestions for presentations  
**Homework**: Presentation preparation; journal entries  
**Comments**: Each group is presented with an Article Summary Form (see Appendix B), which is to be turned in after the presentations. Students are reminded that presentation grades will be given on a group basis and that they are collectively responsible for the oral and written aspects of their work. As they are preparing, the instructor circulates amongst the groups providing assistance. Toward the end of class, suggestions are given for both presenters and listeners. Presenters are told to imagine that they are giving a TV news report, and that they should speak accordingly. Because the audience is permitted to ask questions after the second presentation, they must be prepared to explain anything that is not clear. Listeners are encouraged to take notes and are provided with some sample clarification questions (For example: Could you please explain ___________?) Regarding the journal entries, there are no restrictions in terms of length, content, or style. Students are simply encouraged to reflect on what they have learned. |
| **Week 4** | **Content**: Group presentations; hand in article summary forms  
**Homework**: Search for next article and bring copies to class  
**Comments**: Each group has 15 minutes to set up, present, and answer questions assuming a 90-minute period and six groups. Group evaluations are made according to the following criteria: preparation, which includes completion of the Article Summary Form, visual aids, and prefatory explanations; and presentation, which concerns pacing, clarity of expression, and ability to answer questions. Each criterion is judged on a five-point scale of quality indicators (see below) for a total of ten points.  

**QUALITY INDICATOR SCALE**  
- 5.0 = A = Excellent, superior  
- 4.5 = B+ = Very good, commendable  
- 4.0 = B = Good, above average  
- 3.5 = C+ = Adequate, satisfactory  
- 3.0 = C = Weak, deficient  
- 2.5 = D+ = Poor, inadequate  
- 2.0 = D = Unacceptable, inferior |
| **Week 5** | **Content**: Return article summary forms; complete new forms  
**Homework**: Presentation preparation; journal entries  
**Comments**: Each member of the group receives a copy of the Article Summary Form with comments and an evaluation on it. Because students tend to have trouble answering the questions on the form, the instructor provides assistance when visiting each group. This is also an appropriate time to discuss specific issues regarding the article content or problems with the previous presentation. |
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| Week 6 | **Content**: Group presentations; hand in article summary forms  
**Homework**: Search for next article and bring copies to class  
**Comments**: The roles of the group members are to be rotated so that each student has an opportunity to play the part of anchor, media specialist, researcher, and writer. |
| Week 7 | **Content**: Return article summary forms; complete new forms  
**Homework**: Presentation preparation; journal entries  
**Comments**: By selecting articles of personal interest that become the basis of the presentations, discussions, and reflections, students play an active and empowering role in the class. Along with this responsibility, there is a multi-faceted critical component. Students must consider article appropriateness and validity when selecting and summarizing it; furthermore, they invariably take an intellectual stand on its content through discussion and reflection. The instructor’s primary function, as a result, is one of guide or facilitator, rather than the traditional arbiter of course content and direction. |
| Week 8 | **Content**: Group presentations; hand in article summary forms  
**Homework**: Prepare for mid-term review  
**Comments**: Students should bring their journals to class to facilitate a roundtable discussion of all the news stories covered in the presentations. This is a good opportunity for the instructor to check to see if students are having any difficulties keeping up to date with their journals. |
| Week 9 | **Content**: Roundtable Review—Women in the World Today  
**Homework**: Search for next article and bring copies to class  
**Comments**: The roundtable review can be carried out in several ways. The instructor, for one, can lead a class discussion on the topics and issues presented thus far with an eye toward highlighting any recurrent themes or patterns. Depending on class size, it might be better to convene in small heterogeneous groups, instead of the normal groupings, so students can benefit from other perspectives while acting as area experts who can address related issues. A combination of the two approaches with the latter preceding the former is another way of enabling each group to address similar questions before comparing them with their classmates. Of course, the roundtable review could be used in place of a mid-term exam, although it should be one that allows for various interpretations of the material. Finally, the in-class review might be skipped entirely if Week 15 of the semester is allotted for the final exam, thus permitting time for three more presentations. In this case, it can be assigned for homework and incorporated into the journal. |
| Week 10 | **Content**: Return article summary forms; complete new forms  
**Homework**: Presentation preparation; journal entries |
| Week 11 | **Content**: Group presentations; hand in article summary forms  
**Homework**: Search for next article and bring copies to class |
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<th>WEEK</th>
<th>CONTENT, HOMEWORK, COMMENTS</th>
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| Week 12 | **Content**: Return article summary forms; complete new forms  
**Homework**: Presentation preparation; journal entries |
| Week 13 | **Content**: Group presentations; hand in article summary forms  
**Homework**: Search for next article and bring copies to class |
| Week 14 | **Content**: Return article summary forms; complete new forms  
**Homework**: Presentation preparation; journal entries |
| Week 15 | **Content**: Group presentations; hand in article summary forms  
**Homework**: Prepare for final exam  
**Comments**: Journals are collected on the last day of class and returned to students before the final exam. Their evaluations are based primarily on the number of entries and not their ostensible quality. They should serve as a repository of each student’s work. |
| Week 16 | **Content**: Return article summary forms; final exam  
**Homework**: Students are encouraged to continue reading and thinking about women’s global issues now that they have a better understanding and appreciation for them. Some might want to create a weblog as a means of sharing their observations while continuing to practice communicating in English. The instructor could also establish an informal discussion group online for those who are interested.  
**Comments**: The final exam is an extension of the roundtable review with a focus on people, places, and problems (for example, see Appendix C). Both questions and answers are provided in which students must make connections between them. Students are allowed to refer to their journals or any other materials from class. For students at an advanced level of English, essay questions may be appropriate in which they are asked to synthesize what they have learned and/or relate it to their own experiences and perspectives. |
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What problems do you have as a woman living in Japan?
   Finding a job (33%); Sexual harassment (23%); Job discrimination (21%)

2. Do you think that other Japanese women have the same problems?
   Yes (83%); No (9%)

3. Do you think women in other countries also have these problems?
   Yes (64%); No (26%)

4. What problems do you think women in other countries have?
   Don’t know (16%); Sexual harassment (13%); Sexual discrimination (9%)

5. What countries do you think are good for women to live in?
   USA (31%); Japan (29%); Sweden (13%)

6. What countries do you think are bad for women to live in?
   USA (23%); China (14%); India (11%)

7. What countries would you like to live in? Why?
   Japan (30%); Australia (13%); USA (11%)

8. What countries would you not like to live in? Why?
   USA (17%); Africa (17%); China (14%)

9. If you were not born in Japan, what country do you wish you were born in? Why?
   USA (29%); Australia (16%); Switzerland (11%)

10. If you were born again, would you like to be a man or a woman? Why?
    Woman (73%); Man (26%)

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1 Following each question are the top answers and percentages in parentheses. The results are based on 70 respondents from two sections of this intermediate level class.
# APPENDIX B: ARTICLE SUMMARY FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title of Article</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary in English</td>
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**What is the main problem for women?**

**What are some possible causes of this problem?**

**What are some possible solutions to this problem?**

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation: Score</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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APPENDIX C: FINAL EXAM

Name ____________________________ Date ________________

Fill in the blank with the correct answer.

I. PEOPLE: HELEN CLARK, ANGELA BUSTILLO, WANGARI MAATHAI, ANN DUNWOODY, QUENTIN BRYCE, SALLY KRISTEN RIDE, PRATIBHA PATIL

1. ________ was the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.
2. ________ was the first female president of India.
3. ________ was the first woman to become a general in the US Army.
4. ________ was the first female Prime Minister of New Zealand.
5. ________ was the first woman to be governor general in Australia.
6. ________ was the first American woman in space.
7. ________ was disqualified from a Spanish beauty pageant because she is a mother.

II. PLACES: VIENNA, SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN, NORWAY, TAIWAN, NEPAL, AFGHANISTAN, MOROCCO, NICARAGUA, USA, CONGO, SOUTH AMERICA

1. In ________ the government has banned all abortions.
2. In ________ prostitution is a major problem for girls.
3. In ________ a woman can be arrested for driving a car.
4. In ________ child labor is a big problem for girls.
5. In ________ rape is being used as a weapon of war against women.
6. In ________ schoolgirls are required to wear skirts as uniforms.
7. In ________ there is a law that allows husbands to rape their wives.
8. In ________ women are not allowed to watch men’s sports games.
9. In ________ women are gaining political and economic power even though the majority still lacks equality.
10. ________ is trying to address the problem of unequal pay for women.
11. ________ is trying to increase awareness of gender mainstreaming.
12. ________ is number one in the world in gender equality.
III. PROBLEMS (BY THE NUMBERS): 4000, 49, 60, 29, 50, 8, 33, 19, 25, 46, 435,000

1. __________ percent of Italian women have jobs.
2. __________ percent of Mexican women have been abused by their partner.
3. __________ percent of teenagers in Santiago, Chile are affected by violence.
4. __________ women are killed by their husbands each month in Peru.
5. __________ percent of European MPS (Members of Parliament) are women.
6. __________ courts in Venezuela are devoted to violence against women.
7. __________ teen pregnancies were recorded in the US last year.
8. __________ percent of Turkish women living in Germany have experienced physical or sexual abuse in their marriage.
9. __________ percent of positions in Florida’s top 150 public companies are held by women.
10. __________ American women are killed each year by their husbands or boyfriends.
11. __________ Iranian women were not permitted to board an airplane because they were not wearing the hijab (a scarf that covers a woman’s face).