

Global Education in English Classes

From Elementary School to University in Japan

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Abstract

This paper aims to clarify how to incorporate global education into English classes from elementary school to university in Japan. The importance of global awareness education has been recognized gradually, but there are still some English teachers who do not pay enough attention to it and just concentrate on English language skills. If English teachers have a viewpoint of global education when they teach English, students' skills of international communication would be improved much more. I would like to suggest that project-based learning should be introduced into thematic English lessons focusing on global education.

1. Introduction

It has been officially decided that there should be one English class a week for fifth graders and sixth graders at Japanese elementary schools from the spring of 2011. We have often heard criticism that Japanese homeroom teachers do not know how to teach English to children and that they may tell native-speaking teachers of English, who are assistant language teachers, to take complete charge of English classes. The result is a critical situation where by English classes are merely fun games and singing songs. It is true that English classes for children should be fun, but they should also be content-based. Especially for fifth graders and sixth graders, English classes should have deeper content which could inspire them intellectually. Now that English classes at elementary schools are to be compulsory, there should be an appropriate aim and goal of education based on a comprehensive curriculum. If a comprehensive curriculum from elementary school to university can be created, Japanese education as a whole would be by far better and would be conducted more effectively and fruitfully.

2. Learning English through Global Themes

I would like to suggest teaching English through global themes to students from elementary school to university. In thematic learning, various activities and questions which are intended for exploring a theme can be pursued by students, and their intellectual curiosity can be stimulated

as the class goes on. It is not at all one-sided input of knowledge or skills by the teacher, but it is a trial to draw out the knowledge, experience or interest which already exist in the student. The teacher is also learning new things with students, and they can respect each other and widen and deepen their learning together. In this way, each person is expected to contribute to the process of learning.

Thematic learning originally started in New Zealand and it has been developed in the U.S. A., the U.K. and Australia which have been accepting immigrants from various countries. At the beginning, thematic learning was adopted for children of immigrants as they acquired a better command of English compared to a situation when only English language was taught. When children are interested in the topic, they can learn deeper and their English proficiency will improve more in a natural manner.

Since then, in those countries, thematic learning has been adopted also for children whose mother tongue is English. As the theory of "Whole Language" came to be admitted, a number of experiments and practices have been conducted by those who make much of the social background and the cultural aspect of a language. It has been reported by teachers in those countries that this approach was very effective in increasing people's literacy and in elementary education. In Australia, there was a stagnant period of education as the input approach didn't work. Teachers in Australia thought segmentation by subjects was the cause and introduced integrated studies using thematic learning. Then, children who hated studying became motivated.

Global themes can be categorized into the following five areas: (a) environmental education (b) human rights education (c) peace education (d) cross cultural communication and (e) area studies. Learning through global themes will improve students' attitude, knowledge and skills for international communications.

(a) In the area of environmental education, the aim is to raise a global citizen who is considerate enough not to damage or threaten the sustenance of creatures' lives and the earth environment. S/he is expected to be able to change her/his way of living by reflecting on her/his own behavior in order to create a sustainable society and also by thinking of the connection between her/himself and the earth or the relation between the present and the future. S/he needs to take an interest in current environmental issues, study them with a calm attitude and decide what s/he should do. What s/he learned, s/he should not only put into practice but also be communicated to others. Therefore, s/he should nurture good communication skills to discuss these issues with others. Having interests, responsibility and fairness is an essential attitude of the student in environmental education. As for knowledge, s/he should learn about the earth environment, system of living things and the relation between human society and nature. As for skills, the ability of judgment, insight, research, imagination and problem-solving are necessary.

For concrete themes, it is possible to deal with waste, endangered animals, rain forests, dinosaurs, toilet papers, etc. As for myself, I have been researching Native American culture and society and I am impressed that these people are concerned about the earth and the environment which will be good for their descendants who will live several generations ahead. Therefore, I include their stories in my environmental class.

(b) In the area of human rights education, it is most important to rear a person who will live responsibly, thinking of the multi-cultural and interdependent society, which is the basic concept of international education. Self-esteem, that is, accepting oneself as one is, is the first step. A generous attitude to try to understand others with consideration comes next. A society where each individual is respected equally is necessary. Students should learn to make a contribution to realize such a society. When teachers give a lesson in this area, they should be careful not to make the lesson too theoretical. The approach and content should be concrete, timely and familiar to students. Teachers should take students' ages, learning environment and living conditions into consideration when they choose a topic. Each student will reflect on her/his own past, relate it to the new knowledge and learn what is important for protecting human rights by heart and by mind. Teachers should support students when they try to do something to protect someone's human rights. An essential attitude on the part of the student must include self-esteem, positive feeling about oneself, sympathy, generosity and fairness. Students should become familiar with laws regarding human rights, problems apparent in the world, world history and the ways of conflict resolution. The skills to be learned should focus on an assertive manner of speaking, collection of information, communication, judgment, imagination, criticism and ability of conflict resolution. We could deal with five senses of a human being, children's rights, gender discrimination and indigenous peoples.

When I was studying English at the University of Winnipeg in Canada, I had an unforgettable learning experience. The teacher showed us a documentary film on a real incident which had happened in Winnipeg. A young girl of the first nation of Canada was bullied by Caucasian high school boys. The girl cut off her braided hair to deny her identity. Her mother was shocked and tried to find the boys and visited all the high schools in Winnipeg. Finally, the boys were found. The solution they chose to adopt was that the boys stayed with the mother and the girl for a week. After the week, the boys understood more about them and learned to get along with them. I was really touched by this story and could not help crying. The best part of this story is that the solution was not to punish the boys but rather for them to stay together with the mother and the girl to understand and respect each other. Whenever I give a lesson on human rights at university, I tell this story to my students

I would recommend using the picture book entitled *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* for human rights

education. Oliver is a boy, but he likes things that girls usually like. He is bullied and called a sissy. He finds a note which reads “Oliver Button is a sissy”. One day he starts to learn tap dancing and practices hard to participate in a contest. He does not win the first prize but he does very well. Students at his school look up to him and stop bullying him. Finally, the note is changed to “Oliver Button Is a Star!” I used this book in my seminar class and had my students do some activities. Each student showed her/his favorite page to the other students and made a comment why s/he liked it in English. The students were to imagine Oliver’s feelings and say, “I wouldif I were Oliver.” using the conditional. They also had to judge if Oliver’s schoolmates’ reactions were right or wrong and explain why.

(c) Human rights education leads to peace education. The definition of “peace” in international education is not only a state free from wars, battles, conflicts, or violence. The condition for peace is that everyone all over the world receives gifts from the earth equally and that no one is killed or wounded mentally or physically for reasons unrelated to her/his responsibility. The objective of peace education is to foster students’ capability to cope with daily disputes and resolve conflicts with a positive attitude and grasp the reality of the structural gap between developed countries and developing countries. For young learners, approaches should use familiar topics to them. For example, food will be a familiar topic, and they can widen their study to include the unequal relationship between producing countries and consuming countries. Japanese people eat lots of shrimp and prawns. Most of them are imported from Indonesia and Vietnam at the sacrifice of their mangrove forests. Local people in Indonesia cut down mangroves and make artificial ponds to raise prawns. As their fishing is done around mangrove trees, they cannot catch fish anymore. Prawns are too expensive for them to eat and are exported to Japan. Teachers can use a picture story to show this story to young learners. After listening to the story, they can write letters to the Indonesian children who appeared in the story in simple English. In peace education, we are to focus on students’ attitudes such as sympathy, fairness, calmness, non-violence and self-esteem. As for knowledge, students should learn the history of past incidents, wars and oppression. For skills to be fostered, capability of communication, negotiation, planning, judgment, imagining, creating, criticizing and resolving conflicts are to be mentioned.

In 1991, I visited the Iowa Peace Institute as a video journalist and made interviews with the president of this institute, Ambassador McDonald, who was protesting against President Bush regarding the Gulf War. The President was trying to resort to a military solution, and the ambassador was trying to persuade him to use an economic blockade to stop Saddam Hussein. What impressed me most during my stay at this peace institute was how to educate school children for the goal of peace. At school there were some student leaders for conflict resolutions who wore orange T-shirts. They had good listening skills, judgment and negotiating skills. Once

a quarrel started in the school, one of the leaders wearing an orange T-shirt came to the spot at once and began the process of conflict resolution. Ambassador McDonald taught me how important it was that peace education should be conducted at the elementary school level. Since then, I have been thinking of peace education for Japanese students. As long as I work as a teacher, I will bear peace education in mind.

I have two students from Okinawa in my seminar class. Thanks to their presence, all the students in this class and I studied the history of Okinawa. The students from Okinawa told us their experiences regarding the commemoration day of the Okinawa Battle in 1945. Then, we did Okinawa awareness quizzes in English which I had found in the website of JALT. One of the questions was as follows: "Aside from Okinawa, how many places in mainland Japan experienced land battles in WWII?" The answer was zero.

Another question was "In total, how many people died on Okinawa in WWII?"

There were three choices: (a) 30,000 (b) 80,000 (c) 200,000. The right answer is (c). Okinawa is the only place in Japan which experienced land battles in WWII. Therefore, along with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Okinawa can be a peace educational theme for students.

(d) In the area of cross cultural communication, teachers should pay most attention to developing students' ability for real communication, that which is not superficial but heart-to-heart communication. Sometimes, it can happen that students can intensify a biased image or a stereo-typed image of another culture and have a negative attitude toward it after studying about it. Or students might say, "Oh, I'm lucky to be born in Japan. I'm content that I'm Japanese!" In the class for cross cultural communication, students should engage in activities which enable them to feel actually that every human being is an individual who has similarities and differences and that variety in a society enriches the society. Students should be encouraged to take interests in groups of people who have a different culture and to get along with and respect them. Teaching materials should be devised so that students can find universal validity beyond superficial differences and they can realize the joy and possibility of real communication. If they not only accept and tolerate differences with a generous attitude but face different cultures positively, they will know that they can learn important things from them. They can understand their own culture or values more deeply and will be able to establish their identity more clearly.

In a lesson for cross cultural communication, students' attitude includes acceptance, generosity, curiosity, interest, sympathy, modesty, compassion and fairness. As for knowledge, students should learn various cultures, languages, customs and ways of communication. As for skills, capability of verbal and non-verbal communication, judgment, analysis, insight, negotiation, problem-solution, objective thinking, treatment of information and imagination will be desired.

Once I dealt with a topic "People from Other Countries" for a cross cultural communication

lesson. In Japan, we see many foreigners, but we seldom think about what countries they are from. We tend to consider them as one group of foreigners. However, if we are to make friends with them, we will know where they are from and why they came to Japan. At the beginning of this lesson, the students listened to a CD of a theme song and did a listening activity. Then, they were shown a picture of many children from various countries and grouped them and said to the other classmates which child s/he liked best. I brought as many potatoes as my students to the class. I gave each student one potato and had them observe their potatoes and draw their pictures. The students described their potatoes in English and gave them specific names. After that, I collected the potatoes and told the students to look for their potatoes. All of them succeeded in finding their own potatoes. In this way, students learn that even a potato has its own character and identity. Then, we went on to learn about six people from different countries. Each of them has a name and a reason to come to Japan. The next activity is ranking. I had the students guess the top 10 countries from which foreigners came to Japan. The changes in ranking over the past 10 years was very interesting. The last activity was to think about the relation between Japan and other countries.

For children, “school” can be a topic for a cross cultural communication lesson. The teacher can make paper dolls of six children who live on six different continents. They speak about their school lives. As children learn about school lives in different cultures, they will think positively what they want to learn at their own school, what an ideal school is like, and the meaning and possibility of school education. A technique of photo language can be used to foster children’s imaginative power. The teacher can show photographs of six children who live on different continents and say to the students, “What do you imagine?” and “What do you want to ask them?” After that, the teacher can ask the students which child they were most interested in and have them explain why.

(e) In area studies, a specific area or a country will be examined within the frame of international education. So far, Europe and the U.S.A. have been studied more often in English classes in Japan. Especially in English classes for children, teachers tend to introduce religious or cultural events of Europe or the U.S.A. For example, Easter parties, Halloween parties and Christmas parties are very popular and familiar. More countries and areas outside of Europe and the States should, however, also be introduced. When we choose a country, we should be careful to pay attention to the seven continents of the world if we aim to provide global awareness education.

At the moment I am trying to draw my students’ attention to African nations in my seminar class. I am a foster parent for a 9-year-old girl in Ethiopia. She sent me her photograph and her letter written in Amharic. This language was new to me as well. I also got her letter translated

into English and understood what she wanted to say. I showed her photograph and her letter to my students and asked them to write letters with pictures of their faces for her. Most students are good at drawing pictures and they seemed to enjoy writing letters to this girl. I made color photocopies of their letters and intend to post them on the wall in the classroom which our seminar class will use during the school festival. The students researched the present situation of African children and will make poster presentations for the school festival. I hope to link their study to our school event, which will be a good opportunity for their presentations.

It may be felt that some global topics are too difficult for young learners, but there are some ways to introduce global themes understandably even for 1st and 2nd graders. In English classes at elementary schools, teachers often deal with colors. When they teach colors, they could ask young children a question like this: What color is your heart when you are happy? Children can answer as they imagine freely. If one student says it is pink, it is a right answer. If another student says it is red, it is also correct. You can relate colors to feelings and children can express what they think freely in the classroom. In a class which aims to encourage students to be more aware of global issues, to enhance their self-esteem is the first step. If they can be proud of themselves, they can be generous enough to understand another culture. After relating colors to feelings, teachers can go on to colors of people's skins in the world. Color is a popular topic in English classes at Japanese elementary schools, and, thus, it can be expanded to global awareness education.

If students are to learn global themes from elementary school to university like a spiral, it should not matter whether the theme is difficult or not for young children. Even if students cannot understand the theme fully, they are going to learn a similar theme from another point of view in their future. If something remains in their mind when they encounter that theme for the first time, their understanding of the theme will be much deeper at the second encounter at a later period.

I dealt with Native Americans in my English class for sixth graders at an elementary school in Nagareyama in Chiba Prefecture a few years ago. I was with my American friend who helped me in the class. When I showed my lesson plan to teachers of the school, they were very anxious wondering if the students could follow my lesson. As a matter of fact, it was proved that the children liked my Native American lesson very much. It was a new world for them, and it was true that they didn't understand all of my lesson, but they enjoyed and showed a great interest in it.

In this lesson, I used the technique of photo language at the beginning. I showed a large photograph of Native American children who were in modern clothes. I asked the students who they thought they were. Some students said they were Mexicans. Others said they were Japanese.

Next I showed them a photograph of Native Americans in their traditional costumes. One student cried out, "Oh, I know. They are Indians!" I showed the first photograph again and told the students that most Native Americans dressed in modern fashion now. Showing the photo of Native American children, I asked the students what questions they would like to ask them. They answered me in Japanese, and I helped them say the following questions in English and had them practice them together. (1) "What food do you like best?" (2) "What sport do you play?" (3) "Do you go to school every day?" When they asked these questions in English, they felt as if they were really communicating with the children in the photograph. Then, I showed them a video of a TV documentary program of Native Americans in which I played the role of a reporter. In the last scene of the video, I was also wearing the traditional costume with them, and the tribal chief spoke their original language which is so different from English. I displayed a number of Native American items such as a rain stick which makes a sound of rain, beautifully beaded bags, and musical instruments. The students were able to be in touch with these items. Then, I gave several versions of the national flag of the United States to each group of students and had them think and express their ideas. The students learned that there were indigenous people on the American continent at first and when white people arrived there, they drove away the native people and founded their own country. At the end of the lesson, I showed them a picture story (*kamishibai*) of a Native American legend. A young man got married to a beautiful woman who was originally a buffalo. They had a son. Once the man was not nice to them, and the woman and the son left him. He did his best to get them back, but the mother and the son were transformed into buffalo and now they were among a big herd of buffalo. The man succeeded in finding them among many buffalo, but he himself was transformed into a buffalo. This legend has a message that all living things on the earth are related with each other, and that human beings must respect other creatures as their comrades. The story was read in English by my American guest, and I occasionally added explanation in Japanese and asked the students some questions to confirm their understanding. With the help of beautiful pictures, the students understood the story using their imagination. The time was up, and I had to ask the Japanese teacher of English at this school to review the story with small cards I had made and write their comments and reflections in the next English class. Many students gave comments that they had found out that there were not only white people but also various races in the United States of America.

In the following year, at another elementary school in Nagareyama, one of my colleagues gave a lesson on global warming to sixth graders. The lesson was conducted in English. I was with her in the class, but I also used English to help the students. She used a cartoon to introduce this topic. The cartoon showed that the ice on the north pole started to melt, and that a polar bear was in trouble. Students had a group discussion looking at this cartoon. In the class of thematic

learning, each student contributes and s/he is to use her/his critical thinking power based on her/his experiences. The teacher took out a hair dryer and some ice cubes and showed the students how ice cubes melted with the heat of the dryer. After that, each student was given a sheet of paper and created her/his own cartoon showing global warming. One of the students drew a polar bear which was drowning. The teacher collected some of the children's cartoons and made up a story of global warming. We asked the students to fill in their reflection sheets. Many of them said that they had a good time learning English and global warming at the same time. Some said that they didn't understand all of what was said in English, but that they would like to learn from the teacher again.

In this way, English classes can be fun and have meaningful content. At present, when one looks at English textbooks used at junior high schools and high schools in Japan, one will notice that they deal with so many global topics such as Severn Suzuki's speech made for ECO, the Environmental Children's Organization, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, landmines and Chris Moon, the stories of wars, etc. I know a book entitled *Hana's Suitcase*, which deals with the Holocaust, is given to high school students for a reading assignment. Even at the elementary school level, we could incorporate global topics in English classes. Thus, the link between elementary school English and junior high school English is possible. We should let students know why they are to study English even at the elementary school level. In my opinion, the objective of education at all levels should be to develop lifelong learners prepared to be innovative participants in the global community. As UNESCO's appeal mentions, "we should regard an international dimension and global perspective in education at all levels and in all its forms." Considering English as a door to the world and aiming at becoming better global citizens, students should study English and global issues at the same time.

3. Project Work

English activities have been undertaken at public elementary schools in Japan since 2002 as FLEX, Foreign Language Experiences/Explorations. According to the Courses of Study provided by MEXT, these activities are to be practiced in the "period of integrated studies" for global education. The studies should provide interdisciplinary, broad educational experiences that can foster a "zest for living", students' ability to think, learn and act for themselves, as well as to develop problem-solving skills. Therefore, English classes at public elementary schools must not be limited to teaching language skills to fill children's brains with English grammar and vocabulary. And English classes should be student-centered if they are undertaken in the period of integrated studies. Considering English as a door to the world, students should appreciate the joy of knowing new things, being connected to others, having meaningful and moving experiences,

expressing themselves, respecting differences, and learning in a cooperative manner. Then, a conservative lecture-style class is not right for these purposes.

I suggest that project-based learning should be introduced into thematic English lessons focusing on global education. This methodology as that of teaching English was advocated by Dr. Diana L. Fried-Booth in her book *Project Work* published in 1986 in the United Kingdom. Since then, project work has gained wide acceptance, and teachers have experimented with it in a wide variety of teaching environments worldwide. It has been applied to teaching Japanese also. Let me quote the definition of project work from her book:

Project work is student-centred and driven by the need to create an end-product. However, it is the route to achieving this end-product that makes project work so worthwhile. The route to the end-product brings opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence and to work together in a real-world environment by collaborating on a task which they have defined for themselves and which has not been externally imposed.⁽¹⁾

Children will make groups and choose their topic. They are to decide what their end-product should be. Then, they will discuss how to divide their roles for the task so they can achieve that end-product. They will think about the topic, use their imagination and conduct research. Stoller categorizes project work into several types such as “research, survey, production, performance, encounter, correspondence, and organizational.”⁽²⁾ He also says there are combined types.

In the National Curriculum of the United Kingdom and the suggestions from the Department for Education and Skills, some example projects for children in Key Stage 2 (Age: 7-11) in the subject of Modern Language are mentioned as follows:

<Children research a project on a town or a region of France.> This is done individually or in small groups. Children send letters or e-mails to a partner school in France. They present their project to the class. The project could be accomplished entirely or partially through the use of computers, for example, using Powerpoint. Research skills will be developed by accessing websites as well as reference books from the library.

<Children could prepare and exchange a shoe box with their partner class abroad.> The contents of the shoe box can be discussed and added to throughout the unit of the work. It might contain items relating to life in the locality of the school or relating to a specific topic.

The projects mentioned above are “research” and “correspondence”. As an example of

“survey”, another teacher had his students in an extracurricular class do surveys on part-time jobs done by Toyo Gakuen University students and tried to publish a newsletter which summarizes the results of the surveys. As an example of an “encounter” project, I brought foreign guests to English classes or to the classes of “the period of integrated studies” at elementary schools in Nagareyama. As an end-product, children can produce a drama or write poems and read them to the class (production and performance) or they can organize a party (organizational). I’ve heard from my British colleague that project work is used extensively throughout all levels of education and has a 150-year history in the United Kingdom. It is believed that this kind of work encourages enquiry (asking questions, defining questions for enquiry), information processing (comparing/ contrasting information), and finding relevant information (sorting/ classifying/ sequencing information).

I also attended a seminar held at the Australian Embassy in Tokyo which aimed at demonstrating how they teach “integrated studies” to children in Australia. They gave me a list of students’ learning skills which teachers can develop if they have the students do project work. It includes the skills mentioned above and it has more: analyzing, checking, note-taking, summarizing, visually representing information, presenting in a variety of ways, identifying patterns, testing hypotheses and inferences, interpreting, making choices, planning, designing, observing, performing, estimating, time management, hypothesizing, predicting, inferring, recognizing bias, revising, synthesizing, reflecting, responding to others’ ideas and work, self-assessing, providing feedback, cooperating, sharing ideas, reporting, persuading, justifying, considering different opinions, elaborating, explaining, generalizing, viewing, listening and working independently. What struck me most at this Australian seminar was that children may take some social action as the result of their research project. For example, when students researched the decrease of the number of koalas, they located the cause that eucalyptuses, which are koalas’ food, were also decreasing and made many posters requesting people not to cut down eucalyptuses and put them in many places. If a child learns something through project work and talks about it to somebody, it can be regarded as a social action. It is the first step. As the child grows, s/he could improve her/his presentation skills.

As some examples of project work done by Japanese university students, Taylor (2006) presented the followings:

<Wiki> Use wiki technology to have students collaborate to make a document, such as a story, poem, report or any kind of text. At Kobe Women’s University I had students pair up with students in Argentina. They emailed and chatted using Instant Messaging to get to know each other. Then they were set an assignment; to choose and research a city to write

a page for guidebook. They were asked to find a hotel, and things to do for a fun day in the city, including places to eat. They used the Internet for research and produced a one-page text. Either student could begin the work, and both students could add to it and edit it.

<Keypals> At KWU I had students use email (and messaging) to get to know students in Argentina. We also had a class blog. We gave students tasks to do - for example, we put a class photo on the blog, then the students described themselves, and their partner identified them from the picture.

<Surveys> Students in three countries had a lesson on mobile/cell phones. Then, students in Portugal made a survey and students in Portugal, Sweden and Kobe filled it out. The results can be put in graph forms shown on a webpage. Later, Japanese students added the photos of their cell phones on that webpage.⁽³⁾

These three examples sound very interesting. As in the United Kingdom, project work can be used throughout all levels of education.

In Stout and Murray (2007), they describe “*kamishibai*” projects for junior and senior high school students in Japan. Let me quote:

Kamishibai stories consist of 12 to 16 oversized picture boards with the words printed on the reverse sides of the boards. Although these stories are often perceived as children’s stories, these stories are also enjoyed by adults. The appeal and adaptability of this traditional folk form makes Kamishibai an ideal basis for project work in the language classroom.⁽⁴⁾

Murray and Stout use a six-stage project framework developed by Heilman.⁽⁵⁾ The six stages are:

Stage 1: Students and teacher generate ideas and outline the project

Stage 2: Students develop a visualization of the project

Stage 3: Research and Written Aspect

Stage 4: Preparation and Rehearsal

Stage 5: Project Presentations

Stage 6: Reflection on the project

Regarding Stage 5 and Stage 6, Murray and Stout insist that it is very important that the students are given a listening task during the presentations and that the listening task is also the basis of the peer evaluation and reflection on the project.

In the summer of 2008, I attended a one-week seminar on project work at the Institute of International Education in London. The lecturer was Dr. Diane Phillips, the author of *Projects with Young Learners*. It was a really inspiring seminar, and I did a project work myself with two other members. The project title of our group was “Quiz Show on Environmental Issues”. I wanted to integrate a global issue with project work. The target ages for this project are 11 and 12, that is, the ages of sixth graders at Japanese elementary schools. Our project framework is as follows:

< Lesson 1 > The students learn the vocabulary for recycling.

< Lesson 2 > The students decide who is going to do what in the quiz show. They are divided into groups of four or five. They do research before making quizzes.

< Lesson 3 > Each student makes a presentation as the result of her/his research to the other group members. Each group chooses the best quiz.

< Lesson 4 > Each group makes a poster and practices for the quiz show.

< Lesson 5 > The quiz show is held. All the groups compete for the prize. When it is over, the student thinks about environmental issues and writes her/his reflection. Regarding the language, the following English sentences will be practiced in the class:

< Lesson 1 > “What’s this?” “Can you recycle it?” “Do you really need it?”

< Lesson 2 > “Who wants to be the M.C. for the quiz show?” “I do.”

< Lesson 3 > “Which one did you like best?”

< Lesson 4 > “Can I use your pen?”

< Lesson 5 > “If you think it’s true, raise your right hand.” “I will use fewer disposable things.”
“I won’t” “Reuse, reduce, recycle more things.”

The students’ skills which are improved through this project work are: listening, personal, intellectual, learner independence, social, presentation, assessment, writing, designing, drawing, etc.

Dr. Diane Phillips taught us many things in detail regarding assessment. There are many ways both for teacher and for students: tests (writing/oral), discussion, grades, diary/log, charts, comments, questionnaires, portfolio, can-do statements, choosing the best one for a magazine or display, voting for prizes (most creative, hardest work, etc.), compliments, praise, clapping, making a report of a class, publishing one’s action research (article, book, etc.). For teachers, it is recommended that they fill in a feedback sheet for the next project work: “What is good about

this project?” “I could...(suggestions).” As for students, they can answer the following questions: “What did I learn from this project?” “What do I like about this project?” “I could...” If a teacher gives a test to the students, it tends to be negative because the teacher must check how many wrong answers they make. On the other hand, if students make “Can-do Statement” and write like “I was able to make a nice poster.” “I was able to work with my group members in a cooperative manner.” “I was able to listen to others’ opinions well,” it should be more positive. The comment Dr. Phillips gave on our project work was that it was good to be integrated with other subjects or “the period of integrated studies” at Japanese elementary schools. That was just what I aimed at.

Lastly, I would like to refer to the advantages of project work for young learners based on Dr. Phillips’ book:

- (1) It educates the whole child. A project involves the development of the whole child, rather than focusing narrowly on teaching language.
- (2) It integrates language knowledge and skills. The project is a prime example of experiential learning. Language introduced and practiced within a project is directly related to the task in hand.
- (3) It encourages learner independence.
- (4) It caters for mixed-ability classes. Within class project work, there are often opportunities for different children to make different contributions, depending on their capabilities. If individual contributions are valued, the children’s confidence is boosted, they feel positive about their English classes, and they are motivated to continue to do well.
- (5) A project allows for flexibility within the curriculum. Projects can be used either as a supplement, or complement, to the programme which is set by the school, or as the main structure round which the syllabus is designed.⁽⁶⁾

I am determined to put this project work on environmental issues into practice at elementary schools in Nagareyama in the near future.

4. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to clarify how to integrate English with global issues in the framework of project work. As it has been officially decided that English classes are to be compulsory at Japanese elementary schools, some scholars are advocating that they should be separated from “the period of integrated studies”. I am definitely against this idea. It would promote the tendency to focus too narrowly on teaching language. I do agree with Dr. Diane Phillips’ opinion to educate the whole child in English classes as well.

Recently, the pedagogy based on the theory of “multiple intelligences” is valued, and I also think it is very important in English classes in Japan. The way of assessment for students of English must be changed from negative tests to positive “can-do statements”. Too many Japanese students lose their motivation to continue learning English as the results of their unfavorable grades they have got at junior high and senior high schools. If we apply the same assessment system to pupils at elementary schools, it can produce more younger students who dislike English. English classes at all levels of education should give students the joy of learning new things and good opportunities to think about our world and the earth. The mission of all education should be to develop lifelong learners prepared to be innovative participants of the global community aiming for peace.

Notes

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