

GLOBAL ISSUES AND PROFESSIONAL ELT ORGANIZATIONS

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It is an honor and a pleasure for me to contribute the following article to this collection of essays to mark the retirement of Professor Okamura. In his 38 years of service to Tottori University, he has done much to contribute both to English education and to international understanding. I therefore respectfully dedicate this article on global education and English teaching to him.

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, there has been a surge of interest in global issues and in global education by the international English language teaching (ELT) profession. This can be documented in professional journals, in conference programs and in official documents of all the major English teaching organizations. In this article, I'd like to focus on three specific areas where the influence of global education has made itself felt within the profession:

- (1) out-reach efforts by ELT organizations to global issue experts,
- (2) an increasing emphasis in ELT conferences on global issue themes;
- (3) the formation of global issue interest groups within the ELT profession.

As examples to illustrate these trends, I'd like to focus on three major language teaching organizations:

- JALT (the *Japan Association for Language Teaching*, Japan)
- TESOL (*Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages*, USA)
- IATEFL (the *International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language*, UK)

GLOBAL OUTREACH

One key trend related to the growing interest in global education in the ELT profession concerns the efforts by national and international English teaching associations to reach out for ideas, stimulation and resources to experts and organizations in the area of global issues and the field of global education. This outreach has taken a number of forms.

(a) Official Links

Since 1990, the English teaching organization TESOL has had a specially appointed "official liaison" to the United Nations. This person, a professional English language educator, attends United Nations sessions, receives UN teaching materials and

writes articles on the UN and the global issues it deals with for the TESOL newsletter and its 15,000 subscribers worldwide. Through this, TESOL aims to provide its members with accurate information on global issues and to encourage English teachers worldwide to further the aims of the UN by teaching in their classrooms about the United Nations and its work to solve world problems.

(b) Teacher Development

As part of their efforts to promote effective classroom approaches to content-based language teaching designed around global issue themes, a number of ELT organizations have arranged teacher training workshops and seminars for classroom practitioners given by experts on global issues.

TESOL, for example, has shown its commitment to promoting global education through a series of pre-conference workshops and other events which introduce English teachers to experts, resources and ideas from a variety of global issue fields. These events have included:

- *TESOL Day at the United Nations* (TESOL'91, New York) at which English teachers met with UN personnel to learn how to integrate global issues more effectively into their language teaching
- *TESOL Day at the Carter Center* (TESOL'93, Atlanta) at which language teachers attended workshops on conflict resolution by peace education experts from the *Martin Luther King Center for Social Change* and *The Carter Center* (founded by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter)
- *TESOL Day at the Rainforest* (TESOL'94, Baltimore) at which English teachers were shown how to integrate nature and ecology themes into their ELT lessons by experts on environmental issues and environmental education.
- *TESOL Summer Institute on Peace Education* (1995, Vermont) at which English teachers from around the world spent one month taking in-depth courses on peace and on peace education from US and overseas experts.

Similar initiatives have taken place in the United Kingdom and in Japan. In the UK, the British organization IATEFL has featured speakers from such groups as *Voluntary Service Overseas* (VSO) and *Anti-Slavery International* to help EFL teachers better teach about development issues and human rights. In Japan, experts in areas such as peace education, human rights and environmental problems from groups such as *Amnesty International* and *Friends of the Earth* have addressed English teachers at the annual JALT conference about how best to teach these global issues in their classrooms. Specific examples include:

- JALT'96 (Hiroshima) at which UNESCO Linguapax experts from Spain, Germany and Australia gave talks and workshops to English teachers about how to promote international understanding

- JALT'97 (Hamamatsu) at which Canadian environmental educator Tim Grant (editor of *Green Teacher* magazine) gave conference workshops on classroom approaches to promoting environmental awareness
- JALT'98 (Omiya) at which Australian peace educator Lynda Ann-Blanchard (director of the *Center for Peace and Conflict Studies* at the University of Sydney) gave conference workshops on classroom techniques for promoting peace through language teaching

(c) Conference Speakers

The global outreach of professional ELT organizations can also be seen in the choice of plenary speakers invited to speak at national and international English teaching conferences. A variety of examples can be given:

- JALT's 1996 conference (Hiroshima) featured a plenary talk by European UNESCO expert Felix Marti speaking on language, tolerance and world peace.
- TESOL's 1993 conference (Atlanta) featured a plenary talk by US civil rights leader Andrew Young.
- TESOL's 1994 conference (Baltimore) featured a plenary talk by international educator and human rights advocate Mary Hatwood Futrell
- TESOL's 1995 conference (Long Beach) featured a plenary talk by Vietnamese peace activist Le Ly Hayslip.
- TESOL's 1999 conference (New York) featured a special conference session by speakers from UNICEF and the *Hague Appeal for Peace*.
- TESOL's 2003 conference (Baltimore) featured a plenary talk by Morris Dees, founder of the *Southern Poverty Law Center* and its educational magazine *Teaching Tolerance*.

The invitation of outside speakers such as these to international ELT conferences underscores the commitment of English teaching organizations to link English education to the outside world, to raise awareness of global issues, to strengthen commitment to socially responsible teaching and to remind teachers of the wider social context of their classroom work.

CONFERENCE THEMES

A large number of language teaching organizations around the world feature global education and global issues in their conferences. One way this can be seen is through the conference themes chosen by such organizations. Examples include:

- "World Peace and English Education" (Japan Association of College English Teachers, 1986).
- "Language and Social Justice" (ATESOL Australia, 1989),
- "Global Age: Issues in Language Education" (CDELTA 1993, Egypt),
- "Bridges to Better Understanding" (Mexico TESOL, 1995)

- “Global Issues in Foreign Language Education” (Modern Language Association of Poland, 1996).

Over the past decade, there has also been an explosion of conference presentations on global education themes at ELT conferences round the world. JALT’s 1986 conference handbook, for example, reveals no presentations at all on global issue themes, yet its JALT 1996 Hiroshima conference 10 years later featured over 50 such sessions. These included presentations on such themes as international awareness through video, global education and the Internet, AIDS awareness activities, and teaching about human rights. JALT’s annual conference now regularly features conference colloquia, roundtable discussions and workshops featuring English educators from countries such as Russia, Germany, Thailand and Australia speaking on topics as varied as global issues, peace education, environmental awareness and international understanding as they relate to teaching methods, materials and curriculum design.

The same trend can be seen at other international ELT conferences around the world. IATEFL’s 1996 conference, for example, featured its first annual “global issues conference strand” with presentations on topics such as *Global Issues Project Work* (Brazil), *One World Week* (Portugal), *Peace Studies* (Hong Kong) and *ESL for International Understanding* (USA). TESOL’s 1996 conference in Chicago, to take another example, featured a peace education breakfast seminar, plenary talks on social responsibility, an academic session on peace education and materials writing, and over 100 presentations by teachers from countries as varied as Poland, Canada, France and Korea with titles such as *Global Issue E-mail Projects*, *Social Issues and the Language Class*, *Teaching Strategies for Reducing Prejudice* and *Integrating Global Cultures into EFL Materials*.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

A final trend within the ELT profession has been the formation of “global issue” special interest groups (SIGs) within major international English teaching organizations. Currently, the three main groups in the profession are:

- The *Global Issues in Language Education* SIG (JALT, Japan)
- The *Global Issues* SIG (IATEFL, UK)
- The *TESOLers for Social Responsibility* TSR Caucus (TESOL, USA)

The first of these groups to form was JALT’s “Global Issues in Language Education” Special Interest Group (GILE SIG) which I helped to found in 1991. This organization has now been operating for 14 years. Its aims are:

- (1) to promote the integration of global issues, global awareness and social responsibility into foreign language teaching;
- (2) to promote networking and support among educators dealing with global issues in language teaching; and

- (3) to promote awareness among language teachers of developments in global education and the related fields of environmental education, human rights education, peace education and development education.

(JALT GILE-SIG website: www.jalt.org/global/sig/)

The British organization IATEFL established its “Global Issues” Special Interest Group (GI-SIG) in 1995. Its aims are listed as follows:

The IATEFL Global Issues Special Interest Group aims to provide a forum among English Language Teaching practitioners to stimulate awareness and understanding of Global Issues and to encourage the development of global education within language teaching. This approach aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills and values which can help them confront both local and global problems. The GISIG aims to promote a less Eurocentric perspective within English Language Teaching. Global Issues include peace, justice and equality, human rights and social responsibility, racism and sexism, the environment, world development and international understanding.

(IATEFL GI-SIG website: www.countryschool.com/giabout.htm)

The US-based organization TESOL established its *TESOLers for Social Responsibility (TSR) Caucus* in 1999. It was my privilege to be the first TSR Chair. The caucus is described as follows:

TESOLers for Social Responsibility (TSR) comprises TESOL members who are actively engaged in integrating language teaching with social responsibility, world citizenship and an awareness of global issues such as peace, human rights and the environment. The caucus aims to promote social responsibility within the TESOL profession and to advance social equity, respect for differences, and multicultural understanding through education.

(TESOL TSR website: www.tesol.org/mbr/caucuses/tsr.html)

In addition to these three “global issue” special interest groups, other similar groups have formed in the ELT profession. These include:

- a *Peace and Health Education* Interest Group formed in TESOL Italy (1994),
- a *Global Issues* SIG within the Korea TESOL organization (1995)
- a *Global Education* Study Group within the Japan Association of College English Teachers (1996)

The establishment of these groups has enabled English teachers around the world who are involved with global, peace and environmental education to receive funds, begin projects, issue newsletters, hold workshops and obtain conference time to share their research and teaching experience, and to further promote global education within their organizations. The existence of these groups further serves to validate global education as a legitimate goal of language teaching and to highlight the social responsibility of the profession.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of interest within the field of English language teaching (ELT) in global issues and global education over the past decade has helped to stimulate the profession in many ways. It has encouraged a reconsideration of the basic aims of English teaching, sparked a debate about the mission of our profession, promoted a healthy discussion about meaningful content and educational relevance, spurred outreach efforts to global issue experts and organizations, provoked a sharing of classroom experimentation and research through conference presentations, and led to the formation of special interest groups devoted to promoting global awareness and action to solve world problems through effective language teaching. What is clear from these trends is that the commitment of the English teaching profession to promoting global awareness, social responsibility and international understanding is firm and growing stronger thanks to the work of professional ELT associations and of dedicated English language educators in countries around the globe.

Sources

PUBLICATIONS

Global Issues in Language Education Newsletter (Tottori, Japan)
TESOLers for Social Responsibility (TSR) Newsletter (Virginia, USA)
Global Issues SIG Newsletter (Kent, UK)

WEBSITES

JALT *Global Issues in Language Education Newsletter* (Japan)
www.jalt.org/global/

JALT Global Issues SIG (Japan)
www.jalt.org/global/sig/

IATEFL Global Issues SIG (UK)
www.countryschool.com/gisig.htm

TESOLers for Social Responsibility (US)
www.tesol.org/mbr/caucuses/tsr/html

JALT (Japan Association for Language Teaching)
www.jalt.org

IATEFL (International Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) UK
www.iatefl.org

TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) US
www.tesol.org