



Language Education for the Social Future

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Abstract

Historically, foreign or second language education served the needs of the nation or community. However, besides serving the needs of the communities where it is based (e.g., program, school, local community), this kind of education can also have an impact on the communities. The books *Language Education for the Global Citizen* (Sato & Kumagai, 2011) and *Language Education for Social Future* (Sato, Takami, Kamiyoshi, & Kumagai, 2015) view the goals of language education as not just teaching and learning the standard forms of national language (and culture), but also actively participating in communities as a full member, using the language already mastered as well as the one being taught. Active participation includes examining the rules critically, making an effort to succeed, changing the rules as needed by negotiating with others, and taking responsibility as a member of the community. In this paper, I will discuss examples of how this vision was realized by incorporating project-based activities for the Social Issue Project and the Community Involvement Project into the existing curriculum. I will then analyze actual student work on the projects to show how foreign or second language education can influence the sociocultural and historical milieu in which it is provided.

1 Introduction

In the age of globalization, people, ideas, knowledge, and goods move more easily around the world. The differences among the myriad backgrounds of the world's people (e.g. ethnicity, religion, language etc.) may well make the world richer and more interesting, but in reality, they also create more challenges. Some people attack or exclude those from other backgrounds, while some think only of themselves, ignore others, or are indifferent to them. Current challenges include but are not limited to hate speech, terrorism, and conflict with immigrants and refugees. What can language education do to make the world more thoughtful, respectful, and peaceful?

Given this contentious context, incorporating community involvement in language education is more important than ever. One fundamental question is why a focus on community involvement is needed. I believe foreign language education aims to ensure that all students benefit from foreign language learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in communities they belong to or would like to belong to (New London Group, 1996). To realize this objective, teachers need to encourage students to go beyond critically examining knowledge in the classroom, by using language to engage in the community, bringing challenges encountered elsewhere into the classroom and finding responses to them, and returning to the community to see if the solutions actually work.

Long influenced by its sociocultural and historical milieu, language education is often seen as subordinate to the related fields of the university and communities (Steinhoff, 2013) but can actually influence the sociocultural and historical milieu in which it is located. The following section offers a framework for a vision of language education for the global citizen (Sato & Kumagai, 2011).

2 Language education for the global citizen: community involvement

Community involvement is the central focus of language education for the global citizen. To clarify what it means to pursue community involvement through language education, it is necessary to explain how *community* is conceptualized here. In this paper, “community” denotes comprehensive communities like the global community, as well as much smaller communities (e.g. a local community) and groups with fuzzy boundaries (e.g. an online community). A community can occur naturally or be created artificially. Given this definition of community, *community involvement* is here defined as purposeful and ongoing interaction with the community you belong to or want to belong to. More precisely, it entails learning the rules of the community (conventions, customs, “ways of thinking,” “behavioral patterns,” etc.), critically observing the rules without taking them for granted, and taking on responsibilities as a member of the community by upholding good rules and making needed changes through negotiation with others and continuous effort. This chapter presents two examples: the Global Issue Project, in which students became involved in a shared interest, ocean pollution, via an online blog community; and the Community Involvement Project, which brought Japanese speakers in the area into contact with local high school students of Japanese as a foreign language.

Classroom/learning activities that facilitate community involvement should be planned with five main elements in mind: content-based instruction, learners’ individual interests, consideration of diversity, contextual factors, and learners’ self-actualization.

Content-based instruction (CBI) in language learning is an attempt to shift from focusing on mastery of linguistic elements through drills and pattern practice to learning content on various topics and themes using language introduced in the classroom (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989). Many foreign language educators/researchers have expressed concern about the gap between language learning and content learning, and emphasized the need to fill it (e.g. Byrnes & Maxim, 2003; Kern, 2003; Kramsch, 1993). Activities facilitating “community involvement” need to go beyond the binary concepts of “language learning” and “content learning.”

Granted, the factors that prompt people to begin learning a language are various. A single conventional curriculum cannot provide education that respects and reflects learners’ diverse motivations, purposes, and interests. Yet it is possible to create a space where learners can conduct research and share their views on their interests by incorporating activities that allow learner autonomy and freedom to choose the topic and content (as in “project-based language learning,” e.g. Beckett & Miller, 2006).

Participants in communities need to remember that a community (or even just a group with the same interests and goals) consists of people with unique perspectives and diverse values and opinions. To be a constituent member, it is important to recognize and respect *diversity*, both between groups and within the group. Moreover, it is important to provide opportunities to understand each other by considering what constitutes difference (e.g. perspectives, status) and whether differences are important or unimportant (Janks, 2010). Such an understanding of diversity nurtures fundamental attitudes that are crucial to active and meaningful participation in communities, such as how to understand those who are “different” from oneself, how to make oneself understood by others, and how to act together to further the community without excluding “different” people.

In recent years, rapid development of technology has led to the emergence of new communication tools and consequently more diverse and complicated communication styles. In this situation, the role of multimodal aspects of communication is gaining unprecedented significance (Kress, 2000). “Effective” communication in a community requires participants to affirm the multilayered nature of communication (i.e. that various elements are involved in different forms of communication) as well as thoughtfully seek out the best communication styles and usage of multimodal aspects for particular *contexts* (e.g. speeches, letters, chats).

To benefit from instruction that nurtures the ability to continue independent learning and participate in communities, it is crucial that learners set their own short-term and long-term goals and plan

activities with opportunities for step-by-step thinking about questions that can facilitate self-actualization: What do I want to do with the language? What kind of language user do I want to become? Why do I communicate, and with whom? If self-actualization cannot be achieved without the existence of others, then learning that facilitates self-actualization requires interaction with the community that enables self-actualization (i.e. community involvement).

Since learning and using language are essentially social acts (Piller, 2016), language practices that ignore community are meaningless. Self-actualization relies on chances to exercise language in a community that recognizes it. In the following section, I will demonstrate two examples showing how the vision of language education for the global citizen can be realized (Sato & Kumagai, 2011).

3 Two examples

3.1 *Global Issue Project*

The Global Issue Project was conducted in a second-year Japanese class at a private university in the United States in the spring semester of 2009. First the aims of this study, shown below, were presented in class.

Table 1. Global Issue Project: Purpose

1. Use the Japanese language to address a particular social issue.
 - a. Collect information by watching, reading, and listening to materials.
 - b. Explain the collected information to other people.
 - c. State your opinion about the issue.
 - d. Think about what you can do to address and resolve the issue.
2. Convey ideas in an easily understandable way by using language as well as other modalities (pictures, colors, etc.).

Once they understood the purpose of the project, the students, either individually or as a group, selected a global issue based on their interests and listed the vocabulary needed for their research. Following submission of their project outlines, the students consulted individually with the instructor, revised the outline, and created a final product like a video or blog entry. Lastly, they made their final product public, whereupon the students themselves, the instructor, teaching assistants, and students at schools in Japan evaluated it. These parties' feedback on the draft and/or final product allowed students to see for themselves how their own products were received by others. A summary of the procedure is featured below.

Table 2. Global Issue Project: Procedure

1. Choose a social or global issue that interests you and create a vocabulary list.
 2. Submit the outline and revise it based on comments offered by the class instructor, teaching assistants, and classmates.
 3. Discuss how to evaluate the final product in class.
 4. Present the final project on the blog created for this project.
 5. Think about what you should do to get the target audience to read/watch your project, and do it.
 6. Exchange opinions about the issue with other people.
 7. Take action to resolve the issue.
- Evaluate the product based on the criteria you decided on in Step 3.

The students' project topics included ocean pollution, endangered species, tobacco's harmful effects on health, a puppy mill, traditional culture in modern society, and the medical system. When choosing the topic, each student or group also chose a medium they thought suitable for conveying their message. As for assessment, the instructor, the students themselves, teaching assistants, and students at partner schools in Japan evaluated students' projects (drafts as well as the final product)

based on the evaluation criteria. Shown below are the evaluation criteria set at the beginning of the semester by the instructor and students.

Table 3. Global Issue Project: Evaluation criteria

1. Language: grammar, use of Chinese characters, etc.
2. Design: photos, design, etc.
3. Content: theme, structure, flow, interesting, easy to read, new information, etc.
4. Awareness of the audience: consideration for the audience, conveying the product's merits to readers.
5. Originality and creativity.
Acceptance of comments from others.

Elizabeth (pseudonym), a sophomore majoring in organic chemistry, chose the topic of ocean pollution, created a video, and posted it on a blog used for her Japanese class. In her one-on-one consultation with the instructor, she focused on ways to express originality in her work. She also noted in her outline that “my originality lies in how I show interview, photographs, and information.” After exchanging comments with the instructor and Japanese teaching assistants, she decided to incorporate her personal experience at the beginning of the video and to narrate stories from sea animals' point of view. The following table shows her outline:

Table 4. Global Issue Project: Outline questions

1. What social or global issue interests you?
 - Ocean pollution
2. Why do you think it is a problem?
 - All living creatures are connected to the ocean. If we pollute the ocean, many humans and animals get sick. In order to live we need clean drinking water.
3. What is the relationship between the issue and you? Why does it interest you? Why is it important to you?
 - Because I like animals, it is important for me to be kind to animals. My interest is the safety of animals. Every year because of human activities that pollute the ocean, many marine animals die. I want this pollution to end.
4. What message would you like to convey to a Japanese-speaking audience? Is the message the same as the one to the English-speaking audience?
 - My message is this: Ocean pollution is a crucial issue for both human and animals. If we do not clean the ocean, many people get sick and clean drinking water disappears. Because ocean pollution is a global issue, it should be anyone's concern and anyone can help. No matter where people live, the message is the same.
5. Which media do you think would effectively convey your message? What makes the chosen media suitable?
 - Media: Video (slide show and audio)
 - Reason: In order to know how important the issue of ocean pollution is, it is crucial for the audience to see photos of polluted oceans.
6. What is the originality of your work?
 - I will ask other people about their opinion. The originality of my work is the way I show videos and information.
6. What do you think should be done to solve the social or global issue you chose?
 - Using electricity means using fossil fuels, so it pollutes the ocean. Do not put harmful chemicals down the drain or into the soil.
7. What are some of the actions you could take using Japanese?

Especially for Japan, ocean pollution is a crucial problem. Fish are indispensable in the Japanese diet, but because of overfishing and pollution, the yield decreases every year. Japanese generate a great deal of energy from nuclear power plants that create waste that goes into the ocean. The Japanese people must ask politicians to stop building nuclear power plants.

In the video, Elizabeth appeared alongside a sea turtle, a dolphin, and a sea otter. In line with her statement in the outline that “in order to know how important the issue of ocean pollution is, it is crucial for the audience to see photos of a polluted ocean,” she showed actual pictures of suffering ocean creatures and ocean pollution while narrating the story. She explained terms that were hard to understand (e.g., “trawling” or “longline” fishing) using visual aids. When talking about the harm done to ocean creatures by fishhooks, oil spills and leaks, and cruise ships, she displayed not only photos but also statistics showing how much dirty water, chemical-laden effluent, oil, and garbage cruise ships produced. The following comments came from the partner school students in Japan.

I enjoyed the video all the way through. Your explanation was easy to understand because you take the viewpoint of sea turtles, dolphins, and sea otters. Your way of speaking was also very good. (Partner School Student I)

This video was interesting and made me think deeply. The video design was well considered. It was impressive because you narrated the current situation and cause of ocean pollution from the viewpoint of marine animals such as sea turtles and dolphins proposing possible solutions to human beings. (Partner School Student II)

Your point was strengthened and deepened by making a movie. Images conveyed your point more strongly. This video is structured around a narration from the point of view of a cute sea turtle and dolphin. I felt ocean pollution was an immediate problem (Partner School Student III).

Elizabeth provided visual aids and concrete data to help the audience easily engage with the topic. These comments show that she succeeded in making the audience feel that ocean pollution was an immediate problem. The final section of the video proposed the following suggestions for remedying ocean pollution.

- 1) Demand that the government restrict sewage dumping by cruise ships.
- 2) Stop dumping garbage into the ocean.
- 3) Save energy and water (by discarding old machines and purchasing new, more energy-efficient ones).
- 4) Become a vegetarian (thereby saving energy and reducing pollution).

However, two of her blog readers questioned solution 4, vegetarianism:

... Since watching this video, I have been putting effort into recycling, because I think that I should do what I can even if it was little by little. ... On the other hand, I read the comment by Near Rice with much curiosity. Certainly, it is a good idea to suggest people become vegetarians. But is it a realistic solution? For example, couldn't we suggest a stronger focus on research and development regarding clean energy such as solar and wind in order to reduce the use of the energy based on sources such as petrol? (Wrap Middle)

I was surprised when I watched the video because it was the first time I had heard that becoming a vegetarian would lead to preventing sea pollution. As you rightly pointed out, certainly, raising cattle in order to eat meat, processing meat, and cooking meat would mean that we consume a lot of energy. But I would argue that today we do many things in order to grow vegetables and fruits throughout the year. I do not know about the US, but in Japan, I have heard that we turn on the heater (to grow vegetables and fruits). We also use a lot of water. Therefore, I do not think that becoming a vegetarian necessarily contributes to the ecology. (Hula Girl)

Here it is evident that Elizabeth has exchanged comments with a diverse Japanese audience. However, she had trouble understanding nuances of the comments because of her limited knowledge of Japanese grammar and Chinese characters. In class, some students suggested use of online tools that would allow her to successfully understand the nuances of the comments. In response, she commented in her blog comment column:

In general, we do not use heaters to grow vegetables and fruits in the US. Even if we use electric power, we do not use it as much as (in Japan). To raise cattle, we consume not only energy but also wheat. We could give the wheat to hungry people instead. (Elizabeth)

The audience also learned what humans actually do to the ocean and, having watched the video—especially the scenes with very shocking images—felt they would like to be more careful or do something to prevent ocean pollution. The following comments came from the Japanese TAs and a partner school student in Japan:

Humans' happiness relies on others' sacrifice, and as a result, human beings have strangled themselves. (TA-A)

This video provides a great opportunity to think about what it means to protect the environment. I hope other people will be interested even little by little. Then conservation will be easier (TA-B).

You are very good at presentation, Elizabeth. Your work appeals to people's hearts like your paper theater work. Since watching this video, I have been putting effort into recycling, because I think that I should do whatever I can even little by little (TA-C).

I was impressed by your work because you talked about not only the current status and cause of ocean pollution but also suggestions about how to solve those problems. Particularly I was very shocked by the image of the sea otter covered with oil. If I were the sea otter, I would have already died by now. I feel very bad because I sometimes do not sort garbage properly, do dishes with running water, or take a shower with the TV on. (Partner school student III)

Clearly, this project provided students with opportunities to make an impact on the audience.

3.2 Community Involvement Project

The Community Involvement Project, described below, was carried out at a private university in the United States. Twelve students in fall and six students in spring took this advanced-level Japanese course in 2013–2014. For this project, learners thought about the relationship between their future and Japanese language learning throughout the semesters. First, they set goals for (a) Japanese language proficiency, (b) their future, and (c) contributions to the community they (would like to) belong to. The students then located and took part in a community by making the most of their linguistic and cultural background. They discussed their projects' development and shared and solved problems in peer group discussions and individual instructor consultations.

Table 5. Community Involvement Project: Objectives

<p>1. Think about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. your future goal, b. your contributions to the community that you (would like to) belong to, and c. what aspect(s) of Japanese language proficiency you would like to improve (and how). <p>Integrate the above three points into a cohesive vision while doing while doing the project.</p>

Table 6. Community Involvement Project: Procedure

<p>1. Set goals according to the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. your future, b. your contributions to the community that you (would like to) belong, and c. Japanese language proficiency, <p>2. Seek out, engage in, and contribute to a community by making the most of your own background. Hold peer group discussions and individual consultations with the instructor to discuss the development of your project.</p>

Assessment consisted of instructors' and classmates' evaluations of students' final presentations (or speeches, in the spring semester) on the project. The instructors also read students' midterm and final reports. The students chose language exchange (English and Japanese or Japanese and Korean), opinion exchange (e.g. on East Asian politics, animal protection, traditional Japanese music, nuclear

power plants), and community involvement (e.g. a Japanese children's book club and Japanese student association) as their topics.

Eva (pseudonym), a sophomore and electrical engineering major, was a diligent, shy Taiwanese American student from California. When she first came to the Japanese class, she spoke too softly for most people to hear what she said and did not make eye contact when she talked. At the start of the project, she told me she would like to share her enjoyment of (Japanese) language learning with others during the project. Her can-do statements for the fall semester were:

Table 7. Community Involvement Project: Can-do statements in fall (Eva)

1. Content	a. I can create a children's book with other students of Japanese.
	b. I can talk about why I am studying Japanese.
	c. I can cooperate with others to realize the plan that I created.
2. Contribution to the Community	a. I can read children's books to children at the book reading club.
	b. I can show children's books and share appreciation of Japanese and Japan.
	c. I can answer questions from high school students about learning Japanese in college.
3. Japanese proficiency	a. I can speak Japanese more naturally than before.
	b. I can explain my project in Japanese.
	I can write polite email messages in Japanese.

First, Eva decided to create a children's book with local high school students and read it at a children's book club session. But she did not yet know how to write polite email messages in Japanese. After a class discussion of how to write an email to someone you have never met, she brought her email draft to the individual consultation session. Having crafted her email message with the instructor, she sent it to the children's book club.

As this activity had nothing to do with her major, she decided to modify her can-do statements for the spring semester.

Table 8. Community Involvement Project: Can-do statements in spring (Eva)

4. Content	a. I can create read children's books with high school students of Japanese.
	b. I can read Internet articles about science and technology.
	c. I can talk to Japanese people at the children's book reading club.
5. Contribution to the Community	a. I can give high school students more opportunities to speak Japanese.
	b. I can read Japanese children's books to children at the book reading club.
	c. I can tell others about the technology that is developing in Japan.
6. Japanese proficiency	a. I can understand newspaper articles in Japanese.
	b. I can memorize new vocabulary on technology and engineering.
	c. I can speak Japanese more naturally than before.

The revised statements incorporated greater mention of science, technology, and engineering. Finally, late in the spring semester, she merged two fields—Japanese language and science—by deciding to read a children's book on science to the young people in the book club in hopes of increasing their interest in science. Unaware of any Japanese children's book on science, she asked book club members for suggestions. At their suggestion, she read the children's book *Decompose*, which focuses on ecosystems to show that everything in the natural world is connected.

As for her contribution to the community, Eva prepared a coloring book activity to follow the book reading. She later said that the children not only appreciated her reading to them but also enjoyed the activity. She felt that she could communicate naturally with the children. At the high

school she was able to use one hour of class time weekly for a book making activity. She and the high school students developed a plot in both English and Japanese, and added illustrations. Though she had first joined the group as a co-participant, a Japanese high school teacher later asked her to grade the high school students. She had never graded other students and felt that high school students were distant from her, but later said she had learned a lot from this experience.

In her individual consultation sessions, Eva related interesting news on technologies in Japan, such as a glove-shaped keypad, genetically engineered silkworms, and muscle suits for the elderly. She explained the news to the instructor and asked some questions she had about Japanese. She also participated in a Japanese Language Table every week and had the chance to talk about her major when a guest in the field of engineering attended the table.

How did the community receive her participation? As one community member wrote on the post-project questionnaire:

We can now easily move our members' attention from inside to outside the community. Thanks to Eva, we can now think about community involvement project more positively such as involving Hampton high school students. Our book reading club activity received acknowledgement from the town library. More specifically, we received aid to expand our Japanese children's book collection....Young people's involvement itself is a good influence on the children. Because it is hard work to create her own story and express it using language and drawing, I think Eva's original children's book gave a dream and future possibilities to the children. After the book reading, she prepared coloring books and an activity of drawing a picture from the book, and she thought about the follow-up activity, which was not unidirectional from the book reader but went in both directions to share the experience. Because of this our children still remember Eva.

Obviously, Eva's participation in the community had an impact on both herself and the children as well as the community. The club's collaboration with Eva, a nearby university student, prompted the library to provide the Japanese children's book reading club with more support than before.

Both of these projects incorporated the five main aspects of community involvement: content-based instruction, learners' individual interests, consideration of diversity, contextual factors, and learners' self-actualization. In choosing their own topics, learners had to devote attention to the content of the topic. They also engaged in communities of interest. Elizabeth chose ocean pollution as her project topic; Eva took part in the high school Japanese class and Japanese children's book club. Both learners met a diverse group of people and decided on the best communication styles and uses of multimodal aspects for the particular contexts. Elizabeth created a video to show photos and data on ocean pollution, while Eva chose to create a children's book and carry out a coloring activity for children. During the project, the instructor continually asked questions – What do you want to do with Japanese? What skills do you want to improve? Why do you communicate, and with whom? – to facilitate the students' self-actualization.

4 Conclusions

The world and its societies and communities face many preexisting challenges. Solving these problems will require fresh ideas and forces, and people willing to accept them. In this context both teachers and learners are building the future as members of the same communities. Teachers eventually need to pass their knowledge and wisdom on to the next generation. Therefore, they must see their students not only as foreign language learners who need to learn a target language, but also as individuals who actively and creatively engage in the world, society, and communities, bringing their wealth of knowledge to bear on languages and cultures.

Notes

¹ The Global Issue Project engaged with two partner schools in Japan. One school was involved in the project from the beginning; these students commented on both drafts and final versions (e.g. videos, blog entries) by the U.S. students. Students at the other school looked only at final products and left comments on the blogs.

² To provide more detail about goals and the outcomes in terms of Japanese language proficiency, the instructor talked to students individually and set more specific goals with them.

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