

Accentuating the Global in ‘Global Media Studies’

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This essay explores how a global educational perspective can be emphasized across the curriculum in a Japanese university faculty. It first describes the ways in which the curriculum already comprises an educational plan with international dimensions, but then goes on to discuss a more complex conception of global education and how this might be implemented. The term ‘Critical Global Awareness’ is coined to describe the intended outcome of this new concept of global education. The essay is intended to stimulate discussion among staff as to how, building on the solid foundations already laid, the curriculum might be enhanced to deliver its global promise.

Key words: global education, curriculum design, global awareness

For the new Global Media Studies (GMS) Faculty at Komazawa University, a global educational perspective is already emphasized both in the name of the new Faculty and in the content of the curriculum. Subjects such as ‘Global Business Theory,’ ‘Global Business Collaboration,’ and ‘Introduction to Global Media’ together with the intensive English programme in the first two years and a strong emphasis on study abroad clearly advertise the Faculty’s intention to pursue an internationally oriented educational plan. The new Faculty is responding to trends in world society which will shape the twenty-first century and is a bold departure for a university which has not seen a new faculty established for over twenty years. Only eight months into the life of GMS, I would like, in this essay, to develop further the concept of global education our new Faculty represents and suggest various ways in which we need to build on the present curriculum.

Any new educational plan needs to take account of the changes which are occurring in national and international society at the time in order that the new plan can equip students to actively take part in, contribute to and shape the society of the future. This is just as true at the beginning of a new century as it is at any other point in time. Perhaps at the beginning of a new millennium of the Christian calendar Western writers are prone to give current trends apocalyptic significance, but despite this hype it is widely recognised that we live at a time of global transition and that this is likely to lead to the establish-

ment of a new world order. This vision of profound change on the international scene is given ever greater poignancy by the events and aftermath of September 11th 2001. The media prominence of the ‘war on terror’ does not reduce, however, the significance of the huge demographic, economic, technological and cultural trends that are shaping the future.

It is, of course, well beyond the scope of a modest essay like this to give a comprehensive overview of the factors which are thought to be shaping the world our students will inhabit, but it is worth perhaps reflecting on the common buzzwords of ‘internationalisation’ and ‘globalisation’ and to highlight some of the major trends which our and other curricula need to take account of.

Not least of the major changes affecting the world order now is demographic in nature. Changes in population distribution brought about by varied rates of population growth and the concomitant changes in national population profiles are having a profound effect on geo-political power relations, especially in the Asian hemisphere. Population growth in China and India and the expansion of market economies in these and other countries is altering the balance of power between the ‘Big Three’ (America, Europe and Japan) and these burgeoning Asian economies, an effect compounded by the aging societies of the established economies. The younger societies of Asia are, through a number of processes including rapid urbanisation, transforming into societies with large middle classes. (One estimate

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has it that by 2018 over 2 billion Asians will have made the transition into the middle class [Gradol, 1998: 27].) This process fuels and is fuelled by the development of these national economies.

Alongside these trends, Gross World Product continues to increase and volumes of international trade grow at an even higher rate. The rapid growth in the use of electronic technology means that labour can be distributed across borders. The 'weightless', or immaterial economy grows as teleworking and screen-based working become common practice. And transnational ownership implies complexification of the old national ownership patterns for business enterprises. The world is becoming smaller as these trends make societies, economies and individuals more intensely interconnected and interdependent than ever. What we now call 'globalisation' represents the latest exponential acceleration of this integration process [Britannica, 2002].

These changes imply that people from different countries are talking to each other as a matter of course more than ever before. In order to communicate they either have to speak the other's language or they have to speak a common language, or lingua franca. At this moment in time, it is English which most often fulfils this role and which dominates international communication. It is estimated that over one billion people are learning English around the world, a reflection of its global significance. In fact, the position of English is often seen as impregnable, "an intrinsic part of the communications revolution" [The Economist, December 1996], a position bolstered by its role as the language of science and technology, by the explosion in English-dominated global media including the Internet, and by the powerful influence the United States exerts on the world stage.

Given that we live in this age of globalisation and that English is the pre-eminent global language, it seems to be obvious why Japanese university students should be interested in learning about technology, media and international business and why they should want to boost their proficiency in English. To ride on the new wave of business opportunities presented by electronic technological innovations, students need to be conversant with computing and the theories and practicalities of content generation and development. To be able to communicate, conduct business, and exchange ideas with non-Japanese speakers, they need to be able to use the world's

major lingua-franca. Indeed, to be unable to use English will become an ever greater handicap as competition between Asian economies heats up and Japanese businesses have to fight for a diminishing share of the cake. In this context, it appears somewhat perverse, therefore, to question why a Japanese university curriculum should seek to emphasize an international or global perspective.

The issue I have here is not with the general thrust of such a curriculum, which seeks to respond to the ways in which the world is changing, it is more with the detail, with filling out what is conceptualised as a global perspective. There is a danger, in my view, that we can be carried along by an unconditional enthusiasm for an educational programme with an 'international' or 'global' flavour without considering what this might mean beyond a general commitment to English education and study abroad and more specific treatment in individual courses with a global perspective.

The chief concern I have is that an English language component and a study abroad programme in a curriculum do not amount to global education. Of course, learning how to speak the language of international communication is an important step in equipping students for life and work in the global village. It is not, however, of itself likely to bring about a greater understanding of the world, of alternative world views, and different value systems. In order to provide this kind of input, the English programme cannot limit itself to purely linguistic goals such as achieving greater accuracy or greater fluency. Language has to become the medium for communicating about global issues, rather than the object of study and students need to be challenged to address issues that affect their futures.

One aspect of the English programme which thus needs to be addressed is the degree to which we advocate a Content-based Language Teaching (CbLT) approach. This approach emphasizes the informational content matter of instruction as much as the linguistic medium in which the material is expressed or discussed. English can then become the means for learning about international issues, rather than the sole focus of study itself.

This proposed curricular emphasis, of course, begs many questions. It would be natural to assume that a fairly high level of proficiency in a

foreign language would be needed in order to be able to analyse, develop one's understanding of and discuss sometimes complex issues through this medium. Further, one might assume that students' ability to use the foreign language as a medium of study would be considerably greater in the written mode (reading and writing) than it would in the spoken mode (speaking and listening). This assumption appears to be borne out by the experience of this first year of tuition in GMS. Students were able to respond well to an essay question about the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Mohammad Yunus, in the first year compulsory 'Introduction to Writing' class, but found it much more difficult to respond to podcasts on media-related subjects in the 'Listening Skills and Strategies' class, or to talk about such topics in the 'Oral Communication 2' class. These difficulties with bridging the gap between text-based comprehension and aural comprehension and the gap between comprehension and production represent major hurdles to a content-based syllabus.

One major advantage of a CbLT approach, however, is that it potentially provides motivation for learners to develop their foreign language skills if they are asked to consider real-world issues in the English language classroom. Indeed, it is questionable whether a language programme with the purely linguistic aim of establishing a basic language competence in learners can be successful. For students to see the value of using English, they need to be asked to communicate in the target language about challenging topics which matter to them. Of course, it is important to ensure that a CbLT syllabus incorporates a clear linguistic core otherwise it is difficult to be certain that students are making progress in the foreign language and achieving this balance between linguistic and content goals is perhaps the biggest demand when designing such a programme.

Content-based Language Teaching is one way we may be able to enhance the global credentials of the English programme within the new GMS Faculty, but the status of English, the incentives for learning it and the international flavour of the Faculty would be considerably enhanced if English became a fully integrated part of the wider Faculty curriculum, as might be achieved in a 'Language across the Curriculum Approach' (LACA). An attempt to establish a link between English classes and the rest of the curriculum

already exists in the form of the 'Integrated Media and Technology Readings' course which allows the teacher of a specialist subject to 'back up' his or her teaching by having an English language teacher run a linked class which covers some of the same content using English materials. As yet, however, this curricular option has not been tried out and the potential this kind of cross-over subject has to enhance the role of English within the Faculty needs to be explored further. Additional proposals such as making it a requirement that students should be able to choose between being assessed in Japanese or English in every subject or that they should be required to submit reports in English on a minimum number of subjects outside the English programme each year might also be considered. A less ambitious proposal might be to ensure that one key reading for each subject is in English.

But if global education is, as Becker claims, "basic education" [1978], then a 'Language across the Curriculum Approach' may not be the complete answer for its provision. Ensuring that English figures more prominently across the curriculum may be one way forward, but it does not need to be the case, of course, that the global educational content of the curriculum can only be delivered in English. English happens to be a foreign language and happens to be the major lingua franca for international communication, but the content of global education can obviously be delivered in the first language also, and arguably with greater effect. It is important that international, cross-cultural content is incorporated into all subjects across the curriculum if we are to achieve the aim of providing a global education for GMS students. Teachers may already be doing this in the classes they teach, but it is worth discussing how this might be achieved in areas of the curriculum which may not naturally lend themselves to the incorporation of such content.

While incorporating global content into all classes is an important step, it may only be part of the overall concept of global education we wish to develop. What we need to do, of course, is to define what we think providing a 'global education' entails and it is instructive in this connection to look at various proposals that have been made. Agreement on defining such a complex and potentially vast subject is, perhaps unsurprisingly, hard to find.

Attempts to define global education run into

difficulties partly because of a lack of consensus about how wide a remit it has. For example, global education is often run together with peace education, human rights education, environmental education and so on to cover a wide spectrum of moral and values-based content which no one teacher feels a responsibility to address. Because this content touches on the political and personal sensitivities of students and teachers, we can feel that it is easier and safer to leave this kind of content out or perhaps to think of it as the domain of elementary school teachers who are deliberately trying to develop a social consciousness in their charges. University teachers may feel that they wish to teach their subjects ‘objectively’ without letting personal opinions interfere with the content, perhaps with the feeling that if students have not developed an awareness and a sensitivity to social and global issues by the time they come to university, then they never will.

This arms-length attitude to global education tends to mean that a global education agenda is often only espoused by teachers with a personal interest in one or more of the areas it covers. Thus, a teacher who is particularly interested in environmental issues may incorporate something about the destruction of the rain forests into his or her teaching materials, while a teacher who is interested in human rights issues might want to encourage his or her students to join in a letter-writing campaign to protest at the treatment of detainees in a particular country. While this may be defensible, even laudable in some contexts, we need to be aware of the dangers of this type of ‘advocacy-oriented global education’ [Sargent, 2004]. One problem is that these initiatives are at the whim of individual teachers and this can lead to a very uneven and varied response to the call for global education across the curriculum. Secondly, this type of global education carries with it the danger that teachers impose their own views and values onto the students, something that should be avoided if we are to respect students’ freedom to make up their own minds about what are the important global issues and what should be done about them, if anything.

Given that global education carries an agenda of its own—that an international perspective is desirable in education, that it is right to be concerned about what is going on in the world, that we should take individual responsibility for what is going on, and that we should be ready to take

action to solve the world’s problems, it is difficult to see how it can be delivered in a non-proselytizing manner. While it is possibly true of all successful education that it is personally transformative in some way, the danger with global education is that the object becomes for you (the student) to transform your belief system so that it conforms to the way I (the teacher/institution) think about the world. Global education of this kind is not transformative in the sense of liberating individuals so that they can make choices for themselves.

I would argue that what is needed in global education is a balance between developing students’ awareness of global issues at the same time as developing the skills they need to be able make up their own minds about the world. It may be relatively easy for a group of course designers to come up with a set of global issues that could be taken as content for many subjects on the curriculum, but what is being advocated here is that beyond this students should also be equipped with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills they need to understand how the world works so that they can come to their own conclusions about what is significant and what is not and about the right and wrong ways to solve issues. They will then be autonomous learners equipped for the rest of their lives to winnow out the bad ideas from the good and to have a much firmer grasp of the ways the world works.

A recent survey of over 400 employers across the United States*¹ asked these employers to articulate the skill sets that new entrants need to succeed in the workplace, what might be called “Skills for the twenty-first century,” and asked them to assess how well different groups of entrants measured up to these skill sets. The results represented a poor report card for high school entrants to the workplace. Large proportions of these entrants were reported as being “deficient” in three “very important” basic skills of the kind normally acquired at high school (‘writing in English,’ ‘mathematics’ and ‘reading comprehension’) and deficient in three applied skills (‘written communications,’ ‘professionalism/work ethic,’ and ‘critical thinking/problem solving’) which allow entrants to use the basic knowledge they have acquired in school to perform in the workplace. Interestingly, over a quarter of respondents re-

*¹ ‘Are They Really Ready to Work?’

ported that 'writing in English' and 'written communications' were also deficient for two- and four-year college graduate entrants, but that for these groups of entrants 'leadership' was the only applied skill thought to be deficient. Thus, if these results are anything to go by, one way in which value is added by a two- or four-year college course in the United States might be, *inter alia*, in the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills.

While, it would be presumptuous to extrapolate these findings to other countries, I would assume that similar skill sets would be put forward by groups of employers in many of the world's developed economies. It will be interesting to see what recommendations the committee set up by Prime Minister Abe for educational reform proposes, but it would be surprising if it did not suggest among other things that students should be taught to think more critically and become more discriminating about new and traditional sources of information and that they should know more about the world.^{*2} This new, more sophisticated view of literacy which allows for a far better-informed and more critical assessment of global issues should perhaps be at the heart of our basic conception of global education in GMS.

How then to deliver this new brand of global education, what we might term 'Critical Global Awareness' (CGA)? It can, of course, be taught through English classes, chiefly perhaps in the reading and writing classes as a more sophisticated approach to the development of reading and writing skills. It would probably be even more effective, however, if delivery through the foreign language was combined with delivery through the first language in all the other courses on the curriculum. This requires that all teachers know what this CGA syllabus is and how they can integrate its content with the specialist content they are teaching. If this is too ambitious a plan, more advanced elements of a CGA syllabus might most conveniently be woven into the seminar format of classes, particularly as students work towards the traditional graduation thesis. As students work on producing longer pieces of writing, they need to develop research skills, the ability to discriminate between different standpoints, and the ability to present contrasting views on a topic. If there is a requirement that the graduation thesis

needs to present a global perspective on the issue at hand, at least in some part, a CGA syllabus can be delivered even at this relatively late stage of a student's progression through the Faculty. Whether a dedicated CGA class needs to be provided earlier on in the overall programme to boost students' first language reading and writing skills and their understanding of global issues is an open question.

By providing this kind of critical literacy syllabus across the Faculty, we would be justified in saying that the curriculum not only had an international flavour, but that it was actually helping students to acquire the critical skills as well as the awareness needed for forming independent and qualified positions on international issues. Rather than being a new Faculty that includes a faddish millennial buzz-word in its name, we can start to equip young people with the sorts of skills they need in order to be responsible and discerning global citizens in the twenty-first century who value what is best about their own society and culture at the same time as acknowledging when others may have better approaches and solutions.

Naturally, this new emphasis does not necessarily deny the importance of elements of the curricular programme which already exist and which aim to develop internationally minded graduates. As in curricula of other university faculties with an international perspective, the importance of providing a solid foundation in foreign language skills and in encouraging students to take full advantage of the opportunities presented for study abroad are crucial. How we develop the 'study abroad' programme in the future is critical in the success of the global education package we wish to provide. Classroom learning is important, as are discussions with friends and family outside class, but it is impossible to overestimate the value of overseas experience in planting the seeds from which an understanding of global issues can grow. Although students should be free to choose to study what they wish abroad, it is also worth focussing much of our efforts on building programmes for international volunteering and internships which are likely to provide invaluable insights into the ways people in other countries live and work. Despite the dynamic change that globalisation represents, there are winners and losers. Global inequalities are on balance growing rather than diminishing as the haves increase their share of power and the have-nots lose out. Under-

^{*2} See Wallis, C. and Steptoe, S. (2006).

standing this divide and choosing whether or not to act to lessen the divide is an important aspect of global education. It is something which arguably only truly becomes a value which one espouses when one has lived in another society where opportunities and life choices are far more limited than in ones own.

I hope that by presenting several possible avenues for curricular development in this essay, I will stimulate discussion amongst teachers on how to provide a form of global education for GMS students which is qualitatively different from that offered by our competitor institutions.

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