

Newsletter of the "Global Issues in Language Education" Special
Interest Group (GILE SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

GLOBAL ISSUES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

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celebrating 129
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NEWSLETTER #129

Welcome to our first GILE Newsletter of 2024! It was a shock to start the year in Japan with a major earthquake in Ishikawa and a plane collision at Haneda airport. Let's hope the rest of the year will be more peaceful with fewer natural (and man-made) disasters! This winter issue contains: (1) a description by Jennie Roloff-Rothman of a global issues course she designed on the topic of baseball, (2) an article by Kirk Johnson on a 4-year *Peace Wall* project he carried out with his students, (3) a report by Timothy Ang about a college *LGBT* unit he devised for his EFL social issues course and (4) a response by John Spiri to last issue's theme of *banned books*. Our special features this edition include a preview of upcoming events for the year 2024 plus ideas on how to teach about the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. This issue also includes a tribute to the late peace educator Betty Reardon, information on Japan's new 2024 banknotes, a conference report on JALT 2023 (Tsukuba) plus teaching resources for Valentine's Day, Women's Day, Landmine Awareness Day and Earth Day.

◆ We offer electronic subscriptions by e-mail. Let us know if you'd like to try this option!

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Inclusive Education: Teaching an LGBT Unit for an English Language Learners' Class

by Timothy Ang (Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan)



Introduction

Culture and context matter. Into my second year in Japan, I had dinner with some Japanese friends and the topic that night happened to be visas. I was having doubts about my renewal application and jokingly asked if anyone would adopt me. The group suddenly fell silent. It was only later I found out that adoption is known as a legal workaround for gay couples in Japan to make their union official. We all laughed at this and, eventually, this amusing experience would be used as an introductory anecdote for a lesson on LGBT issues in my communication classes at Kansai University.

Background on LGBT in Japan

Japan is in the midst of an LGBT “boom” as Fotache (2016) states. Japanese society has become more accustomed and supportive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues. Dentsu recently conducted a survey which found over 70% of people approve of creating legal frameworks by governments such as same-sex marriage (2018). Another 8.9% respondents out of the 60,000 who took the survey identified themselves as LGBT.

Around the world, this uptick in LGBT interest can be brought to the classroom setting. Norton & Pavlenko (2004) argue that ESL classrooms offer unique environments for both language and culture. Students have also become more positive and accepting towards LGBT identities (Ordem & Ulum, 2020). Several authors note more efforts to inform people about LGBT issues in schools as well (Dale, 2016; Fotache, 2016). This is crucial as education can lead to people becoming actively engaged with current social issues.

Teaching Situation

I taught English for several semesters to 2nd year public policy students at Kansai University. They were lower beginner to early intermediate students with moderate levels of English ability and motivation. Some will be future civil servants so they may potentially encounter issues in regard to legislation for the LGBT demographic.

My class objectives are for students to be able to read the news, improve English speaking abilities and conduct presentations in English. A variety of issues such as the environment, crime, cultural norms, globalization and other topics are covered. Apart from using the textbook for exercises, teachers are allowed to make their own material.

Interestingly, there was no resistance to the topic of LGBT from the administration or fellow faculty.

Class Goals

As teachers we can use English language teaching (ELT) to “pioneer and guide societies into a more emancipatory and transformative form” (Ordem & Ulum, 2020). One may incorporate this objective as one of the goals in the class.

Primary goals:

- stimulate speaking and listening abilities
- learn vocabulary and add new words to lexicon
- practice interpersonal and presentation skills

Secondary goals:

- improve research, problem solving, critical thinking ability
- enhance cultural awareness and sensitivity
- promote altruism and activism

Lesson Breakdown

Most material in my lesson has been gathered and edited by me over time and contains articles, surveys, websites, and videos. Materials are placed in a Google Document as a worksheet broken down into several parts containing links in the text for students to click on as well as additional resources.

The problem with creating a lesson for a 90-minute class is deciding the order and duration of the activities that can achieve both the primary and secondary goals set. A good lesson tries to balance these goals to provide a meaningful language learning experience and an engaging class.

Homework (5 minutes)

A five to ten sentence homework is assigned a week before the unit is discussed in class. This is an opportunity for students to write their thoughts about LGBT issues in Japan. During class, one or two students are called to read their homework.

Introduction (15 minutes)

This unit usually starts with a video on someone's perspective on the topic. YouTube is a useful tool which I've used often. Students are asked about the video and encouraged to express their opinions on gender identity and experiences. After this, students are introduced to targeted lesson vocabulary.

Listening (10 minutes)

About this time, mental fatigue sets in for some so a break is important. After a quick summary a funny video is shown and a script printed out for them to

reenact. For this unit, I use a video from the US sitcom *Will & Grace*. This moment of levity allows a comfortable transition into the next activity.

Pair work (20 minutes)

Students choose from a list of worksheet questions to ask each other. There are two sets based on difficulty that expands their knowledge of the topic. I go around the class during this activity to make suggestions and corrections to their dialogues.

Group Work (30 minutes)

Students prepare 3-minute English presentations with hyperlinked academic papers that include graphs and charts. The students must use presentation keywords and practice gestures to describe the data, explain possible reasons for it as well as give their predictions or opinions. Solutions to problems the LGBT community face may also be asked.

Roleplay (30 minutes)

For the roleplay portion, students are asked to create a conversation based on the different situations on the worksheet. They write their dialogue down on a piece of paper, then practice it with each other. Students are encouraged to try to use phrases or vocabulary they have learned in the worksheet, to write longer sentences and to avoid looking at the paper while reciting their lines.

Reflection Paper / Final Thoughts (10 minutes)

To wrap up the unit, either a related music video is shown or they're asked to write a reflection paper at home that counts for part of their grade. The goal is to see whether they have changed their initial viewpoints after discussing these issues in class. Additional resource links are included for students who want to explore the topic in more depth.

Results of this Experience

Of all my class topics, this LGBT unit seems to get the most engagement and feedback. Some students were surprised while others mentioned that this was the unit they most remembered after the end of the semester. For some, it was actually the first time for them to discuss gender issues.

There is room for improvement in my approach. Caution should have been exercised with terms such as *lesbian* and *new hafu* because these have different connotations. I was told that 'Lesbian' can refer to 1960s pornography for males in Japan while 'new hafu' is defined as a vocation rather than an identity. Learning these subtle yet significant differences was enlightening. I may also have to rethink using the *Will & Grace* clip because it may reduce gay people to caricatures. Additional items could also be added to the unit such as debate, assessments, recommendations on books in

either English or Japanese, and a more organized bibliography. In the future, I'd also like to add a list of LGBT organizations active in Japan.

Conclusion

Despite the surge in interest for LGBT, a lot more needs to be accomplished. Most of the current LGBT legislation seems like window dressing as gay marriage is still not allowed. There are still instances of bullying and gender inequality in the workplace (Chi, 2016). In addition, Tamagawa (2018) mentions the difficulty of coming out in Japan compared to other countries, citing factors of culture, family complexity, and generation gaps.

By curating my own content for a lesson on LGBT, I've been able to educate my students about ongoing issues affecting the LGBT community. This class on LGBT may have serious implications for students' lives. Teaching current topics such as LGBT allows students to traverse preconceived notions and cover topics that are not as extensively discussed in other classes or by society at large. As a result, through fostering discussion with students, there is an opportunity to raise awareness and encourage their active participation in promoting equality for the LGBT community in Japan.

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Appendix - LGBT Teaching Unit

Homework / Introduction

1. In 5-10 sentences, what do you think is the current situation of LGBT rights in Japan?
2. Watch this [video](#) and reflect on it (questions will be asked afterwards).
3. Print out any article about LGBT news / issues in Japan and be prepared to summarize it in 10 sentences next week for group discussion.
4. Vocabulary: *LGBT, coming out, closeted, homophobia, sexual identity, sexual orientation, partner, okama, nyū hafu, transvestite, onabe.*

Listening

1. Will & Grace is a comedy sitcom/series about two gay men and other LGBT characters. Watch this [video](#) and write down the dialogue. ([transcript](#))

Group Activity

1. Think of three ways that you or others can promote LGBT awareness and acceptance in Japan. Write your suggestions on the board or translate the [following measures](#) as a group into English.
2. Here are three reports: [Report 1](#), [Report 2](#), [Report 3](#). Prepare to discuss 2-3 charts/graphs.
3. Go into our LINE group on the topic of LGBT and translate a few sentences from it on the board.

Pair work Questions (Basic)

1. Do you know anyone who is gay? For example, friends, family, siblings, coworkers, etc.
2. Do you think you would be happier if you were the opposite gender? Why / why not?
3. Is it easy or difficult to “come out” in Japan?
4. Should LGBT people have the same rights as everyone?
5. If your friend turned out to be gay, would it matter? Why / why not?
6. Do you believe that coming out would affect your job? In what way?
7. Do you think there should be separate toilets for LGBT people?
8. Have you seen examples of gay culture in the Japanese media?

9. Read about what the “[Stonewall riots](#)” are.
10. Why do you think homophobia exists and how is it shown or expressed?

Pair work Questions (Challenge!)

1. Do you think they should teach LGBT topics in elementary schools in Japan?
2. What does the Tokyo Rainbow Parade celebrate?
3. Do you think being gay is caused by genetics or by the environment? Or both?
4. Sometimes the vocabulary words in the homework portion are a bit offensive. Why do you think so?
5. Do you think governments should allow gay marriage in Japan? Why or why not?
6. Why are there not as many gays in Japan compared to other countries?
7. What do you think about undergoing gender reassignment? This is an [example](#).

Roleplay

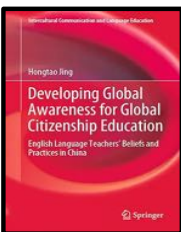
1. Your best friend is gay, and he/she is telling/confessing to you about it.
2. You are interviewing for a job, but the interviewer is wondering why you didn't write down your gender in the application form. Explain why. If you are the interviewee, how will you react?
3. You have a friend who is thinking of gender reassignment.
4. You are an LGBT couple thinking of / discussing about adopting a child.

Reflection Paper

1. Watch this [Youtuber](#) and comment on the relationships and what you think about them.
2. Look at Japan's ranking [here](#) when it comes to LGBT issues and comment on it.
3. What is this [video](#) about? Discuss the visuals, meanings, and how it made you feel/react/think.


Extra Material / Further Exploration

1. Japan's gay culture [history](#) and the current [legal status](#) of gays in Japan.
2. [Bullying and the LGBT community article](#).
3. Three recommended movies. [Blue is the Warmest Color](#), [Brokeback Mountain](#) and [the Bird Cage](#)



Developing Global Awareness for Global Citizenship Education (2023)
This great new book by Hongtao Jing provides a case study of global education and EFL in China.

<[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)> <<https://link.springer.com>>



Rhymed Reflections (2023)
by Francisco Gomes de Matos

This great collection of posters on peace, dignity and human rights can be viewed for free by clicking on “11. Poems PDF” at this link:

<www.hltmag.co.uk/aug23/rhymed-reflections>