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Globalization in the language classroom

The case of the Waga Waga Islands

This article focuses on scenario-driven pedagogy reinforced through the use of simulation as means to develop students' critical thinking and logical argumentation skills in the language classroom. Specifically, it provides a context for integrating globalization into the classroom through a case study designed by the author.

Introduction

At all levels of education, critical thinking and logical argumentation are arguably more challenging for students than any other basic skills. The word *critical* originates from the Greek *kritikos*, which means "to question, to make sense of, to analyze" (Chaffee, 1998). It is by "questioning, making sense of things and people, and analyzing that we examine our thinking and the thinking of others" which enables us to reach the best possible conclusions and decisions (ibid). The move in many language classrooms is towards developing students who can evaluate information from different perspectives and make sound judgments as independent learners and creative thinkers.

Concretizing the abstract skills of questioning and logical argumentation in the classroom can be carried out in a tangible way by

creating specific context(s) for the playing out of particular roles for individual characters or groups of characters in reaching a particular goal. It is by going through a process of actual decision-making, negotiation and formulating an agreed stance that acknowledging hidden assumptions, noticing various facets, unraveling different strands, and evaluating what is most significant (Hughes, 2000) can be appropriately internalized. One such approach to actualize all these skills is effected through scenario-driven pedagogy reinforced through the use of simulation.

Scenario-driven pedagogy and simulation

A scenario is a narrative that depicts "future possibilities, such as proposed systems or plans, and helps policy makers and designers choose among alternative courses of action". (Hobbs and Potts, 2000). The challenge is in developing a representation for scenarios that supports a range of discussion and negotiation activities to support the process of decision making.

A simulation embodies the principle of "learning by doing" – that is, in order to learn about something, we must first build a model of some sort and then operate the model (Fishwick, 1995). Simulation, as an activity, is as natural a process as when a child role plays.

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Children understand the world around them best by “simulating (with toys and figurines) most of their interactions with other people, animals and objects” (ibid). The act of construction and dynamically acting out roles within a given context is a powerful tool for enabling students to internalize complex arguments and the intricate processes involved. Both scenario building and simulation as originally used in the business and corporate world for leadership and management training, are now gaining currency in classrooms as a dynamic means of strategizing and enabling reactions in response to specific problems identified.

Topics for discussion in language classrooms which pose particular challenges to students are noted to generally extend beyond their familiar realm of personal relationships, education, culture and sport to those in the fields of economics and politics as with globalization. Indeed, with the blurring of boundaries between countries through mediation by technology and the media, internationalization and globalization have become buzzwords in various aspects of our life today, not least in education.

Globalization

The term ‘globalization’ has been interpreted in various ways for different purposes. It is generally acknowledged as a ‘catch-all’ phrase used to describe the rapid changes taking place in the world economy. Central to the core idea of the concept is a recognition that it is the process of international economic integration (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006). It is essentially the expansion of production and distribution of goods and services which transcends national boundaries as well as the associated technological, cultural, political and other social changes (Giddens, 1999; Lubbers, 2002).

While it may have, in the past, been driven by territorial conquest and physical force, globalization is today driven by regional and international forces set in motion by organizations and institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the

International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank rules which are liberalizing market access. The essence of the debate appears to be whether this global integration process brings about positive or negative effects – that is, growth and prosperity or poverty and marginalization.

What follows is a specific case of adopting scenario-driven pedagogy which plays out in a conference simulation involving students in groups. Information on possible learning outcomes, background information on the specific context built around a fictitious group of islands and a WTO Conference simulation, recommended procedure with appropriate role cards for participating organizations, and suggested supplementary tasks to reinforce learning are provided.

The case of the Waga Waga Islands

Learning outcomes:

- Raise students’ awareness as to the nature of globalization and the arenas in which it is visible and makes an impact,
- Explain the impact of globalization and its implications – political, geographical, economic, social, cultural – for society and relations between the developed and developing world,
- Define and explain the role of governments and international financial institutions, namely, IMF/World Bank in managing the forces of globalization,
- Explain how the media play a role in influencing the forces of globalization.

Waga Waga Islands

The Waga Waga Islands (WWI), a group of islands in the Indian Ocean, represent a newly democratic nation. After decades of totalitarian government, the country seeks to join the community of regional and international democracies. The WWI has received an invitation to join the WTO.

World Trade Organization (WTO) conference simulation

The WTO is organizing a conference to debate *the parameters that should be imposed in the process of embracing globalization in order to ensure sustainable development*. The conference aims to cut trade barriers across a wide range of sectors and to address the needs of developing countries, for whom agriculture is a particularly sensitive topic. Developing countries are in agreement that agricultural trade needs to be tackled first because it is so important to their economies and because it is heavily protected in many developed countries. At the same time, issues of equality, economic unbalances, peace, trade, developing countries and environment are also expected to be addressed.

A general debate will be held during which representatives from the following organizations will be called upon to present their resolutions:

Waga Waga Peasants League

Waga Waga Women's Peasants Association

International Monetary Fund

Non-governmental organization (NGO) – United People's Alliance

Multi-national corporation (MNC) – Glow International

Media – NTE Broadcast Media

The conference will conclude with the passing of a resolution that outlines the parameters for integration into the global community.

Procedure

Plan and carry out your discussion within your groups. View the resources pertinent to your roles and begin to formulate your stand and arguments for your group resolution.

1. Submit a copy of your group resolution to each group and decide how best you can collaborate with other groups to form alliance to support the passing of an agreed upon resolution.

2. Consolidate the group resolutions into 2 main resolutions to be presented at the conference.
3. Each of the 2 alliances presents its resolution. Each alliance has 3 presenters (20min). Members of the opposing alliance raise their questions/ concerns after each presentation (10min).
4. The 2 main alliances amend the resolution to take into account questions/ concerns/ arguments raised by the opposing alliance. (30min).
5. The amended portions of each of the 2 resolutions are presented by 1 representative.

The resolution should include the following:

- Overall aims and outcomes of your group representation,
- Statements explicitly identifying the critical areas of dissent and supporting evidence to back your assertions,
- Development Plans (over the next 5- 10 year period),
- Recommendations and possible constraints,
- Closing statements highlighting and reinforcing key issues raised.

Background Information

In the Waga Waga Islands (WWI), approximately 80% of the total population directly or indirectly depends on agriculture for their livelihood. More than two thirds of the population is below the food-based poverty line. The contribution of agriculture to GDP is one third. Approximately 85% of the population lives in villages.

Issues involving subsidies and trade barriers on such crops have become controversial in recent discussions on globalization. The WWI believes that the present international trade system is unfair because it has caused tariffs to be lowered in industrial goods while allowing for high tariffs and agricultural subsidies for agricultural goods. This makes it difficult for a newly democratic nation such as the WWI to

export its goods overseas, and forces the WWI to compete with imported goods which are exported from developing nations at artificially low prices.

Roles

1a Waga Waga Peasants League

You are well-known for militant demonstrations. You have approximately 2000 farmers in the league. Your main livelihood is through growing the cash crop of “woga” (a plant with long and thin, edible tuberous roots and brittle stems; used especially to make “wogiri” (an intoxicating drink) and “woga” flour. Woga is also commonly used as a vegetable and as herbage used for stock feed.

Your main concern is to have the right of entry to the developed world markets for tropical products, and to defend the WWI markets from profoundly subsidized exports dumped onto their market. The proposal is also for the developed world countries to cut down their support to home farmers and to slowly phase it out. The WWI is further requesting cuts in subsidies for produce that are sent abroad and dumped onto the WWI markets. You begin to mount plans to intensify the campaign against such subsidies. You aim to mobilize peasants on a large scale for the “Ultimate/Grand Peasants’ March” as part of an awareness campaign programme among the peasants. The March is targeted at 1500km long across the Wagili Plains, a belt stretching from the west border to the eastern ridges flanking the WWI. It will cover 36 Districts and 79 constituencies.

1b Waga Waga Women’s Peasants Association

You believe that the WTO symbolizes the exploitation of poor countries by the developed countries. You want to highlight that the least developed countries lack the financial and human capacity to be able to deal with poverty eradication without the coordinated support and resources of developed countries. You are particularly concerned that the Waga Waga Islands (WWI) be freed from the debt burden and be given more resources to generate employment so as to avoid what you now notice are

increasing signs of the ‘feminization of poverty’. Due to rigid gender roles and stereotypes, women are less able to benefit from available opportunities. Difficulties faced include lower wages, insecure contracts, insufficient benefits and social protection. You are adamant that women deserve better and seek to pursue, among other things, the following:

- increased job opportunities for women, including those in non-traditional fields eg tourism, trade in services, information and communication technology.
- gender wage gaps.
- improved employment conditions and security, and social protection in the informal economy.

2 International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The problems faced by the WWI and other developing countries require a unified, multilateral and multi-faceted approach with actions that cut across national, regional and international levels. You seek to raise awareness and develop understanding in the following, among other areas:

Implement international trade, fiscal and monetary policies to make them pro-development, enhance human resources capacity for higher and more productive employment

Increase international cooperation between developed and developing countries

Enhance access to productive resources

Encourage entrepreneurship and enterprise development in developing countries

Support efforts of developing countries to make progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set by the United Nations

At the same time, you feel conflicted about the issues to be raised at the Conference. On the one hand, you want countries such as WWI to become self-sufficient and over time, integrated into the rest of Asia. On the other hand, you are uncomfortable with changing national law to suit standards of other nations. You are trying to be as open-minded as

possible to the wide-ranging and sometimes, sensitive, resolutions presented. You therefore are asking questions about:

Why the various groups believe what they do.

What these groups see as the outcomes, short term and long term, of change.

How these groups would respond to the resolutions made by others.

3 NGO – United People’s Alliance (UPA)

You are on a campaign to make agricultural trade fair. Your main concern is that poverty reduction remains at the forefront of trade talks and you insist on putting an end to trade-offs with developing countries, which benefit Europe and could damage the economies of developing countries.

You are aware that the media is hot on your heels, acting on a tip-off from an anonymous source that the UPA is being exploited by the Waga Waga Peasants’ League to instigate riots during the upcoming conference. At the same time, you recognize the importance of strong media coverage and a more visible presence in order to gain publicity for your organization and your cause, locally, regionally and internationally. You know you are fighting with other likeminded organizations for public air-time and coverage in the local and international press, and feel you may have to stretch the facts in certain areas in order to create a more powerful media impact.

Your organization is also in dire need of funds to support existing programmes and to pay its members their salaries. The Multi-National Corporation, Glow, that is seeking to invest in Waga Waga, has quietly offered to supply such funds provided they have your support at the conference.

4 Glow International- A Multi-National Corporation (MNC)

You aim to diversify your markets in the next 5-10 years. You seek to maximize profits from your already successful investment in developed world and aim to carve out niche areas in a few identified markets in Asia.

You walk the tight rope in seeking to balance expansion in the developed world and at the

same time addressing the needs of developing countries such as the WWI. To this end, you strive, at the same time, to encourage the European, and American governments to phase out or at least reduce the total amount of export subsidies. You believe that this will address the current distortions in world agricultural markets, given that the bulk of exports from developing countries such as the WWI are agricultural products. You also aim to be seen to support the efforts of the WWI and other developing countries to contribute meaningfully to sustained economic development, and the fight against hunger and poverty. This is particularly critical given the long-term goals of your company, Glow International, to make inroads into the markets of countries such as WWI.

You have quietly agreed to provide funding to the NGO United People’s Alliance provided they support your aim of removing Waga Waga Island’s agricultural trade barriers.

5 NTE Broadcast Media

You have been appointed as the official conference broadcaster of the Waga Waga Conference to provide live coverage of public sessions. You aim to consistently give daily coverage to the progress of the conference itself and to the anti-WWI conference demonstrations with a possible expose on the NGO the United People’s Alliance inciting the Waga Waga Peasants’ League to violence.

As you believe in delving deep into the hearts and mindsets of these people for a more comprehensive and in-depth representation of their needs, you are also thinking of an in-depth coverage of the possible life of a farmer, Tobo, who is a member of the Waga Waga Peasants’ League. This is aimed at sensitizing the public to the human drama aspect of one man’s life story and the implications of globalization on a micro-scale.

You are willing to go overboard to the extent of sensationalizing the story as you are eyeing the National Documentary Award which you lost by a narrow margin to a rival contender from another company in the industry last year.

At the same time, you are being pressured to portray globalization in a positive light by the government of Waga Waga, which intends to have Waga Waga become a full-fledged member of the World Trade Organization soon.

Suggested supplementary tasks

Developing group manifesto or creed

Who are you? What do you stand for?

When were you founded? Who are your members? What is your overall goal? What do you believe in? (overall ideals, philosophy) What is your slogan?

What is your case?

What are the issues you wish to raise? Why are these critical to your group? What is the stand you are taking on these issues? What are your specific plans to fulfil your goals? What specific resources do you have to further your case? What do you see as obstacles or constraints your group may face? What recommendations do you have to overcome these?

Extension scenarios

These extend students' understanding of issues and perspectives gained in preparing for the WTO conference simulation through supplementary activities based on different perspectives taken on core issues specific to the role they play. Students identify the key issues in the dispute, and, for each issue, offer a set of possible outcomes or decisions to be taken. Negotiation involves participants trading options across the issues in dispute, trying to offer a set of options that will meet the needs of all the relevant participants for the specific contexts in focus.

Waga Waga Peasants League

You draw on footage of demonstrations and treatment by local authorities, Grand Peasants March scenes. These are integrated into a brief documentary to be accompanied by a memorandum as suggested below. Memorandum submitted to the local governing authority (Native Council of the WWI) signed by members holding key positions in your organisation. You may wish

to state explicitly the specific issues you take objection to, the problems and constraints faced by your people, suggestions of how these can be overcome, what you would like to see reformed and how these would benefit your people.

Waga Waga Women's Peasant's Association

You will focus on the challenges women face in the WWI when seeking an education, employment and legal protections. The report should include narrative pieces, one or two mock interviews, and an editorial. Care should be taken to provide "viewers" with background on the WWI and on issues presented in the stories. For example, how does the WWI's woga industry influence the country's economy?

Have students start their "investigative reporting" by locating the WWI on a map. Guide students in selecting topics for the newscast. Encourage them to provide peer feedback on each other's stories while they are writing, before they finalize their drafts. When the newscast is ready, videotape it and have it ready for presentation in the final round of the Conference.

International Monetary Fund

You will present the opening address as Managing Director of the IMF. You seek to develop understanding and consensus among member states on the brief history, role and responsibilities of the IMF which you represent. You aim to highlight the current opportunities and also risks of globalization. You single out specific major economic challenges which lie ahead. You spell out explicitly a few (4-5) guide posts for the IMF in its contribution toward globalization. You may wish to consider the following for inclusion in your presentation: Research findings, data and statistics, pie and bar charts, graphs, projected growth figures, etc.

United People's Alliance (UPA)

You draw on material from your official website. You have put up blogs of WWI farmers and the letter to the European Union (EU) Trade commissioner. You also provide information with the aim of raising greater publicity for the UPA and for the purpose of

raising funds. You prepare statements for a press conference with blown-up facts of the current situation and issues to further your cause for the Alliance.

Glow International

You are on a commercial and publicity campaign, disseminating materials leveraging on supporting the WWI and other developing countries, and at the same time, expanding into the markets of the developed world. You provide video clips of the CEO of Glow International (GI) planting seedlings of the woga plant in various countries in Asia and Latvia, and of efforts by GI in sponsoring various community service projects in the region as in GI staff helping to build schools in rural areas in Pakistan, and in teaching farmers how to operate new machinery and equipment acquired.

Conclusion

It is in the spirit of empowering students to think more cogently, act more decisively and argue more convincingly that scenario-driven pedagogy and simulation as described in this article aim to fulfill. Ultimately, the creative imagination and purposeful design of classroom practitioners who seek to adapt and develop meaningful and challenging practices – all for the good of their students – go a long way in enhancing language learning in the areas of critical reasoning and argumentation.

Note: The material described in this chapter is used in the development of a research project of the author as Co-Principal Investigator: 'Enhancing Junior College students' critical thinking and writing skills through argumentation, enacted role play in immersive affinity spaces and reflection' (LSL 7/06 CYS), funded by the Learning Sciences Laboratory, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

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