

Learning More About Asia in EFL Classes

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to clarify the importance of learning about Asia in EFL classes from elementary school to university. English is a global language not only for its native speakers but also for non-native speakers. However, EFL teachers in Japan have been apt to deal with more European and American cultures in classes. In order to foster global citizens who respect every country equally, it is important to teach more about Asia in EFL classes. In this article, units about Asia in English textbooks used by Japanese students are to be introduced with suggestions for deepening their content. I will also illustrate my original lesson plan using the picture book of dreams of street children in Asia and the picture letters of encouragement from Turkish children after the East Japan Great Earthquake.

1. Introduction

Asian globalization has become a growing force in the 21st century, and globalizing Asia needs English as a tool for communication within Asia and with the rest of the world. The leaders of ASEAN countries are united through their English language usage. If one wants to be a leader of an ASEAN country, s/he needs to have excellent English proficiency. Teaching English to young learners in ASEAN countries, China, Taiwan, and Korea is much more advanced than that of Japan. Asian people seem to be really keen on English education.

Thus, English is a global language, which is used by Asian people as well, but in EFL classes in Japan, teaching materials tend to cover more European and American cultures. For example, in the English textbooks named “New Horizon 1-3” for Japanese junior high school students, the main characters are Emi and Shin from Japan, Ann from Canada, Mike from Australia, and Judy from the U.S.A. There are 24 units in total, and only two units deal with Asia while four units deal with the U.S.A. and Canada. As for another English textbook named “Sunshine 1”, only one unit out of 10 deals with Asia, but .three units cover Yuki’s life in the U.S.A.

After checking all the six kinds of English textbooks for junior high school students in Japan. I admit that all of them try to include Asian topics, but the quantity is not enough. In order to

foster global citizens who respect every country equally, more about Asia should be taught in EFL classes.

2. Asian topics in English textbooks for Japanese elementary school students

In the spring of 2011, foreign language classes were made compulsory for all fifth graders and sixth graders in Japanese elementary schools. English is taught in most foreign language classes, and “Eigo Note 1 & 2” published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) are the most commonly used English textbooks. The authors of “Eigo Note” emphasized the importance of global awareness education, and they intended to include not only countries in which English is the mother tongue but also countries where English is used as a second or third language in the textbooks.

Lesson 1 in “Eigo Note 1” introduces how to say “hello” around the world. American, French, Russian, Swahili, Chinese, Korean, Mongolian, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, and Maori greetings are learned. In Lesson 3 in the same textbook, students learn how to count numbers in Chinese and in Korean. Lesson 5 introduces traditional clothes of China and Korea. In Lesson 6, a Korean girl introduces typical Korean food. In Lesson 8, school subjects in China are shown. In Lesson 9, a Korean student talks about his breakfast.

Lesson 2 in “Eigo Note 2” introduces letters around the world including Chinese, Korean and Thai. In Lesson 3, there is only one sentence which refers to Asian countries: New Year’s Day in China. In Lesson 6, the target sentence is “I want to go to Italy.” Min Yomha from Korea introduces herself. The national flags of China and Korea are shown. In the final presentation of this lesson, students are expected to talk about the countries they want to visit. One Japanese student says she wants to go to China, and another student says she wants to go to Korea as model sentences. In the pages to introduce world heritage sites, the Great Wall of China and Taj Mahal of India are shown with their photographs. In Lesson 7, time differences in the world are learned, and students are expected to know that the time in China is one hour behind Japanese time. In Lesson 8, a famous story of a white horse in Mongolia is mentioned when stories from foreign countries are introduced.

I admit there are some possibilities in “Eigo Note 1&2” that could promote global education, but the elements of global education are scattered and the aim of the students’ learning is not clear enough even if teachers read the teacher’s guide.

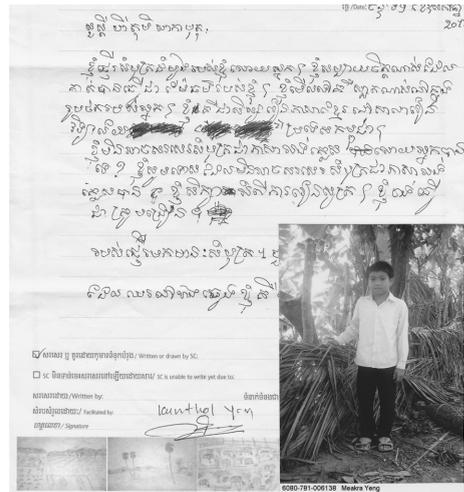
According to the UNESCO Guiding Principles for foreign language education, the teaching of modern language is not an end in itself, but should serve by its cultural and human aspects to train both pupils’ minds and characters, and contribute to better international understanding and

to the establishment of peaceful and friendly cooperation among peoples.

I do not think the UNESCO Guiding Principles are understood well by Japanese teachers. I am often invited to elementary schools to give teacher training. At the beginning, I always ask the teachers what is the significance of learning English in elementary schools and why MEXT made foreign language classes compulsory. I seldom receive positive and clear answers. I do not blame these teachers. The fact is that MEXT started compulsory foreign language classes without explaining the reason and the rationale clearly enough to teachers in elementary schools.

When I observed an English class on various letters around the world (Lesson 2 in “Eigo Note 2”), the teacher taught about this topic very lightly and quickly, saying, “Oh, there are various types of letters in the world, aren’t there?” and that was all. If I taught this topic, I would show a letter from Cambodia written in Khmer and another one from Ethiopia written in Amharic that I received and would have my students write Cambodian letters and Ethiopian letters for themselves. I am a foster mother for a Cambodian boy and an Ethiopian girl and exchange letters with them. I know how difficult and unfamiliar their letters are. I would introduce these children’s daily lives as well. If students personalize the language, they can learn it well. In my seminar at my university, the students wrote some words in Amharic for a greeting and the other sentences in English and sent their letters to the Ethiopian girl. Then, they did research on her country and made a poster presentation. I am going to have my students write letters to the Cambodian boy in the next semester.

It must be hard for elementary school students to write passages in English, but they can imitate and try writing different letters of foreign countries listed in “Eigo Note 2”. Students should experience writing them. Then, they will realize how hard it is for foreign people to learn *hiragana* in Japanese. To understand other people’s situations and feelings is the most important part in global awareness education and in international communication. In EFL classes, teachers should make it clear that not only English but also all the other languages are as important. Beginning with interest in the English, language, students may be led to study other foreign languages, which is a favorable result of language education. In order to foster a global citizen who respects every country equally, teachers should introduce their students to various foreign languages with clear intention.



A letter from a Cambodian boy

International exchange is very effective to motivate young learners to learn foreign languages. In my seminar class, students enjoyed exchanging letters with an Ethiopian girl and Turkish children and learned a lot about Africa and Asia after that. If the teacher gets in contact with NGOs like “Plan Japan” or “World Vision” or becomes a member of a group named “e-pals” on the Internet, s/he can easily find a partner for their students to interact with. I found a Turkish teacher who is incorporating global education into her English classes very actively through “e-pals”. She and I can share teaching ideas, and she is very inspiring. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, she had her students write picture letters of encouragement in English and sent them to me. I forwarded the letters to Japanese teachers in devastated areas. Students in those areas and my students in my seminar replied with thank-you letters in English. My students said that they had never thought of Turkey before, but it was interesting to learn about this Asian country. They also said that they realized English was a global language which they could use in communicating with Asian people.

When I attend conferences of the Japan Association of English Teaching in Elementary Schools, I always meet teachers who are keen on international exchange with a view to motivating their students to learn English. They say students realize the purpose of learning English when they have actual communication with foreign students. They also enjoy learning other cultures. The teachers are confident that it is the best way to motivate their students, and that is why they continue their international exchange programs. One teacher found her partner in Hong Kong when she visited there to observe English classes. She made a connection with a Hong Kong teacher and had her students exchange letters in English with students in Hong Kong. When her students noticed that the English ability of Hong Kong students was excellent, they started to study English harder and they got interested in the daily lives of Hong Kong students.

I suggest that, in exchanging letters, traditional games in each country should be a relevant topic for elementary school students. For Japanese young learners of English, traditional games in Asian countries are interesting, and they can watch an informative video on this topic made by UNESCO Bangkok. The video is in English, but Japanese students can follow it because there are a lot of games in Asia which are similar to Japanese games. In the webpage of UNESCO Bangkok, states:

Children’s traditional games are inseparable from community life. Their forms and patterns are as richly diversified as the cultural and geographical conditions in which children are living and growing up. Often they have been developed in close relation to the religious and ritual traditions of community. The Asia-Pacific region can pride itself on having one of the richest repositories of children’s traditional games.⁽¹⁾

I would introduce Sepak Takraw and Kabaddi. The former is a ball game which has been played in South East Asia since the 9th century. “Sepak” means “kick” in Malay and “Takraw” means “ball” in Thai. Kabaddi is a team sports which is played in South Asia and started in India. It is an Indian national sport. During a game, a person on the offensive side has to keep on calling “Kabaddi, kabaddi, kabaddi...” as a rule. I suggest children play these games so that they can experience Asian culture.

Traditional folk tales and stories of Asia written in English may be good teaching materials in order to introduce Asia to young learners. The Mongolian folktale *Sukh's White Horse* is one of the most well-known and is available with a CD recorded in English and in Japanese. This book is introduced with only one sentence in Lesson 8 in “Eigo Note 2”, and if the teacher who teaches this lesson knows nothing about this Mongolian folktale, s/he is sure to ignore it. In order to incorporate global awareness education into EFL classes, teachers' interest in other cultures, knowledge and clear intention are vital. Therefore, the training of teachers is of great importance.

If you visit the webpage of APCEIU (Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding under the auspices of UNESCO) located in South Korea, you can find the following introduction of a book entitled *Telling Tales from Southeast Asia and Korea: Teacher's Guide*:

“Telling Tales from Southeast Asia and Korea: Teacher's Guide,” presents a collection of 27 prominent folktales from 11 ASEAN member state countries and Korea. Boasting as the first of its kind, the book hopes to lend teachers to instill in their students a sense of mutual respect for various cultures and teach them about the similarities and differences on various cultures of Southeast Asia and Korea through folktales. Additionally each story includes “cultural notes” and a glossary to help understand the various local cultural traditions and terms which are used in the stories.⁽²⁾

I would like to recommend the book series for children: *You Can Enjoy International Exchange — In Order to Be a Global Citizen in the 21st Century*. The first seven books are about 14 Asian countries. From a perspective of a child who is eager to do international exchange, the books introduce Asian countries with a lot of photographs. In the book about Turkey, a famous folktale about a funny and humorous man similar to Ikkyu-san, who is very familiar to Japanese children, is introduced. In the front page of this book, there is a chart of simple greetings in 9 Asian languages. In the back page of this book, there is another chart of children's games in 14 Asian countries. This book series can increase children's sense of familiarity to Asian countries.

If teachers use these helpful teaching materials, they can deepen their students' learning about Asia in English classes.

3. Asian topics in English textbooks for Japanese junior high school students

To promote global awareness education, the English textbook *New Crown* published by Sanseido can be recommended. Among the main characters, you can find Asian ones like Ratna from India, Ming from China, and Chakia from Sri Lanka.

I would like to refer to Lesson 8 in *New Crown 2* in particular. The title of this lesson is "Landmines and Children." Landmines can be found in Africa and in other parts of the world as well, but this lesson features Cambodia, and a job of a deminer, and a Japanese volunteer Mr. Kurimoto, who teaches how to read Khmer to Cambodian children. I quote the passage:

- 1 What are these? They are danger signs. These signs are seen in the forests and fields of Cambodia. What is the danger? Landmines. Cambodian children like to play in forests and fields, just like you and me. But some of them are killed and others are injured. Landmines do this.
- 2 *Emma*: Landmines are terrible. Are they removed easily?
Ken: No, they aren't. Specialists are needed.
Emma: How do they remove landmines?
Ken: They usually have to do it by hand. See this man. It's slow and dangerous work.
Emma: I can imagine that.
- 3 *Ken*: This language poster was made by Mr. Kurimoto, a Japanese volunteer.
Emma: Why did he make it?
Ken: Well, you see, some Cambodian children can't read the danger signs.
Emma: I see, so they enter dangerous places.
Ken: Right. There are many ways to help people, aren't there?
Emma: Yes, there are.⁽³⁾

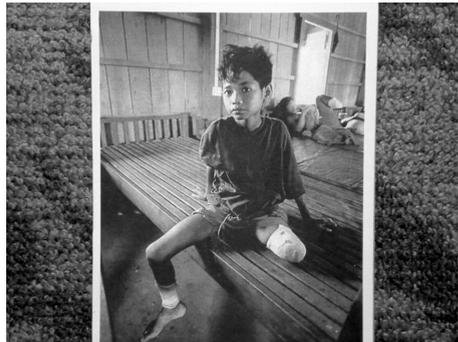
I read a report by a junior high school teacher who actually taught this lesson with her original ideas.⁽⁴⁾ The grammatical target in this lesson is the passive form, and she introduced it with a photograph of the Tokyo Air Raid. She spoke to her students like this, "Look at this picture. At midnight on March 10th 65 years ago, Tokyo was attacked. About 100,000 people were killed. Many mothers were killed. Many fathers were killed. Many children were killed. From survivors, their peaceful lives were taken away. We must never forget what happened in Tokyo 65 years ago." Students easily understood the passive form and went on to read an English

passage on Ms. Kisako Kimoto, who experienced the air raid. The first sentence was “Kisako was loved,” and the students followed the meaning smoothly.

Then, she showed a photograph of a Cambodian boy who lost his leg due to a landmine and asked these questions: “Where does he live?” “How old is he?” “What happened to him?” The next is a quiz about landmines. “How many more years will it take to remove all the landmines on the earth?” The answer is 1,100 years. “How much does it cost to make a landmine?” It costs only 300 yen to make it but 30,000 yen to remove it. These facts are depressing, but when students learned about an admirable job of a deminer and that of Mr. Hideyo Kurimoto, who teaches Cambodian children how to read, they come to realize there are many ways to make the world peaceful.

She did the following activity to have her students understand what illiteracy means. She showed three bags with signs written in Khmer. One is medicine, another is poison, and the other is sugar. She spoke to her students like this: “Please imagine! Now you are in Cambodia. Unfortunately, you become sick and get a stomachache. Suddenly a man appears in front of you. He says, ‘I will give you some medicine. Choose one. Which would you choose?’” Her students chose one without knowing the real meaning of each sign in Khmer. Those who chose the right one were relieved, and others who chose the wrong ones were disappointed. In this way, the students’ understanding was deepened.

When I give a lesson on landmines to my seminar students, I use the same activities. The first is the activity of “photo language”, and I use a photograph I found in a newspaper. The Cambodian boy is 12 years old and only 130 cm tall. When he was three years old, his mother got sick and died. His step-mother treated him cruelly and he left home without going to school. He became a child soldier to survive and fought in the war carrying a machine gun. He stepped on a landmine and lost his left leg and a finger in his left hand. When his leg was amputated, there was no anesthesia and he suffered severe pain.



A Cambodian soldier aged 12

I also give a landmine quiz and have my students study a map which shows the countries of landmine producers and the ones which are the most affected victims. Then, I show pictures of several types of landmines and ask them how they feel. Once I took my students to the UNICEF House in Tokyo and had them touch replicas of landmines. I tell them that some children play with landmines when they find them in a field mistaking them for toys. After that, I have them do the following activity so that they feel what a mine field is like. Students make pairs. One buries landmines by drawing 130 dots in the rectangle of a worksheet in two minutes. The other

removes landmines by coloring the dots, which are regarded as landmines, in two minutes. She or he has to color them carefully otherwise the landmines might explode. Students realize how hard it is to remove landmines. The rectangle shows what the landmine field is like in the most affected village in Cambodia and the size of the rectangle is equal to that of a swimming pool. The students imagine how their lives would be if they had to live in the field like that.

I also show a video about a British man named Chris Moon, who worked as a volunteer deminer and lost his arm and leg in a mine blast in Mozambique in 1995. He ran with his artificial leg as the final torch-bearer at the opening ceremony of Nagano Winter Olympic Games in February 1998. He runs many marathon races around the world and raises funds for the clearance of landmines. He is an inspiration to many people in the world. Regarding the anti-landmine campaign, Princess Diana is also well known. In Japan as well, the movement has grown, and our government joined the Treaty of the Total Ban of Anti-personnel Landmines in September 1998.

I also have my students read a real story on a Thai elephant which got seriously injured by a landmine in Burma (Myanmar) in 1999 when she was at work carrying logs in a forest near the Thai border with her young keeper. The elephant stepped on a landmine and had the ankle of her left forefoot blown off. She was taken good care of at an elephant hospital in Thailand and was saved. There is also a video on this elephant made by UNESCO. In the last scene of the video, the elephant is shedding tears, which moves us very deeply. One of my students made this story into a paper theater (*kamishibai*) so that young learners can understand and appreciate it.

As a final step of the learning process, students do research on Cambodia and landmines for themselves, think about what they can do for Cambodian children, and make presentations with posters made by them. In their research, they realize that thirty to forty percent of landmine victims are children. I believe Japanese young students must know the fact.

Another aspect of Cambodia is dealt with in an English textbook named *Columbus 21* published by Mitsumura Tosho. In Unit 2 in *Columbus 21* for third-year students in junior high schools, a Cambodian teacher of English visits a class in a Japanese junior high school and speaks about English education after referring to a long war and landmines in her country. I quote that part:

Kazu: Do they learn English in school?

Sarim: Yes, they sure do.

Kazu: How are they coming along in their English classes?

Sarim: Oh, they're coming along fine. They often talk to each other in English.

Kazu: Really?

Sarim: Yes, in and out of their classes. They know they can learn a lot through English.

It can open up the door to a wonderful future, you know.⁽⁵⁾

The aim of this lesson is made clear at the beginning of this unit. It is to learn more about Asia. There are nice photographs of Cambodian children. In one of them you can see a young boy studying on the street. In another photo, some children are practicing traditional dance. The other photograph shows a number of children packed in a classroom in an open school building. Sarim is engaged in fund-raising for building more schools in Cambodia because there are not enough schools though children are very eager to study. A couple of teachers at my university attended a conference on English education in Cambodia, and they said to me that they were greatly impressed with the eagerness and zeal of Cambodian teachers. I have donated some money to a Japanese NGO for building more schools in Cambodia by fund-raising at our school festival. After learning about Cambodia, more students will cooperate with me hopefully.

4. Asian topics for high school students and university students

As for English textbooks for high school students, many kinds are published, and it would be difficult to check all of them. However, I checked quite a few textbooks and found that Asian topics are not majorly dealt with in any of them. There are a number of important topics regarding Asia, but I strongly recommend that older students should learn about the Vietnam War.

Using the book entitled *Teens in Vietnam*, project-based learning about Vietnam for high school and university students could be planned. The book introduces various aspects of Vietnamese teenagers such as their school days, their family lives, their diet, their fashion and their dreams. The explanation about the American War, known outside the country as the Vietnam War, is very concise and helpful. Every student must know that 2 million to 4 million Vietnamese citizens and soldiers and 58,000 American soldiers were killed during the war.

Third-year students at Doshisha Junior High School in Kyoto read an English book *To End the Misery of War Forever—No Reconciliation, No Peace*—written by Allen Nelson, who fought in Vietnam as an American soldier and worked as a peace activist later. On the day of the school event on human rights, Allen Nelson used to be invited to this school to give a lecture on peace. However, students can no longer see him because he died in 2009 due to bone cancer which is said to be caused by the Agent Orange used in Vietnam. Students do research on the Vietnam War, watch a video on Vietnam and make presentations. They perform an English drama the story of which traces Allen Nelson's life. When they are second-year students, they study "Landmines and Children" in *New Crown 2* and learn about Cambodia. When students read the book by Nelson, they read it intensively chapter by chapter and express their feelings after each chapter and share these with partners, group members, and classmates. They collaborate and study together. They

read the book aloud and memorize the passages. The teacher says she wanted her students to realize that language learning was for connecting people with people and that students study English to know the importance of peace and human rights.

This project was conducted at a junior high school, but it should be appropriate for high school students and university students as well.

Students may be interested to know that “Imagine,” John Lennon’s best-known solo work released in 1971 is related to the Vietnam War. He and Yoko Ono got married in 1969. The next year the Beatles broke up, and as a solo artist John began to send out his message clearer. He and Yoko started a campaign called “Love and Peace.” “Imagine,” which took its concept from a poem by Yoko, expressed John’s passion for world peace. The song crystallized his dream of an ideal world.

“Imagine” soon caught the hearts of young people who, disillusioned by the Vietnam War, were shouting, “Make love, not war.” Together with “Give Peace a Chance,” another of John’s peace songs, “Imagine” contributed to the movement that ended the Vietnam War.

Students can watch movies which deal with the Vietnam War in English. I recommend “Platoon” directed by Oliver Stone. Music and movies must be a good introduction for students to the Vietnam War.

5. Plan for project-based learning about Asia

In an article in a newspaper dated August 11th 2011, it was reported that the Japanese and the Chinese had negative impressions toward each other because of the issue of territories and the interpretation of war history. Seventy-eight percent of Japanese have negative feelings toward China, and sixty-five percent of the Chinese are critical about the Japanese government’s reaction after the accident of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. In order to decrease negative feelings, we should try to understand China better and build more personal relationships. On the other hand, in May 2011, I found an article reporting that money and paper cranes were sent to Miyagi by Chinese high school students who were helped by Japan at the time of Sichuan Earthquake. In addition to China, a number of developing countries in Asia offered help after the East Japan Great Earthquake, and we are grateful for them. Now is high time for Japanese students to learn more about Asia. And they should recognize the importance of English in communicating with Asian people. Therefore, I have made an original teaching plan for project-based learning about Asia.

The first step of my lesson plan is to realize the importance of Asia and our close relationships with Asia. After studying about seven continents geographically, students focus on the Asian continent. Asia awareness quizzes can be given. One example question goes like this: “How

many countries touch the border of China?” Another example is a question: “Does Laos have a coast line?” As for people, Asia has the largest population of all the continents on the earth. In fact, more than half of the people in the world live in Asia. Students challenge a ranking game to think of the top 10 countries which have the largest populations. The first is China, the second is India, the third is the U.S.A., the fourth is Indonesia, the fifth is Brazil, the sixth is Pakistan, the seventh is Bangladesh, the eighth is Nigeria, the ninth is Russia, and which country is placed in the 10th? That is Japan. Students realize that six countries in the top 10 are in Asia.

Next, they do research on foreign residents living in Japan. The total number was 1,482,707 in 1997 and it increased to 2,152,973 in 2007. Where do they come from? I have my students guess the top 10 countries which foreign residents come from and do a ranking game. They learn most foreign residents living in Japan are from Asia. The number 1 is China, the second is Korea, the fourth is the Philippines, the seventh is Thailand, the 8th is Vietnam, the 9th is Indonesia and the 10th is India in 2007. The reasons why they live in Japan vary. Some are staying in Japan for studying, and others are working, etc. Once I was asked by an elementary school in Nagareyama to bring some Toyo Gakuen students from Asia to their school and have them introduce their typical food and games they played when they were children. If they are not available, you could use paper puppets for young learners and have them speak like this: “My name is Yanti. I’m from Indonesia. I’m staying in Japan to work as a nurse.” “I am Wen De. I’m from China. I’m studying Japanese.” You could also make paper puppets using photographs in a book entitled *Children Just Like Me* published in association with UNICEF.



Paper puppets of Asians



Paper puppet of a Mongolian boy

After that, students learn about foreign countries from which we Japanese import goods and materials and to which we export our products. There are many Asian countries in the top 10. They realize the importance of Asia in terms of economics, as well.

The second step is to learn about natural disasters which occurred in Asia in recent years. Of all the deaths brought about by natural disasters in the last ten years, 80% are Asians. In 1999, the Izmit Earthquake occurred in Turkey, and a magnitude was 7.6. More than 17,000 people were killed. In the same year, the 921 (Jiji) Earthquake occurred in Taiwan with a magnitude of 7.6 and

2,415 people died. In 2004, the South-east Asian Earthquake and Tsunami occurred with a magnitude of 9.2 and 230,000 people died. In 2005, the Pakistan Earthquake occurred with a magnitude of 7.6, and 73,320 people died. In 2008, the Sichuan Earthquake occurred in China with a magnitude of 8.0 and 88,000 people died. In the same year, the Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar and 10,000 people died. In 2009, the Typhoon Morakot hit Taiwan, and 153 people were killed. In 2011, the Tohoku Earthquake occurred in Japan with a magnitude of 9.0 and 15,000 people were dead and 5,000 people are missing. Students compare the damage and research about how each country recovered after the disaster. Regarding the Tohoku Earthquake, students are divided into groups and discuss what they were doing when it struck Tohoku, how they felt, and what they can do for Tohoku people. They research the support Japan has received from other countries, and can learn the fact that a lot of people in developing countries in Asia including street children made donations for Japan after the Tohoku Earthquake.

The third step is to know the dreams of street children in Asia using the picture book *If I had the chance...Artwork from the Streets of Asia and the Pacific* (2003) as a teaching material. This book is based on artwork from the Second Asian Development Bank Street Children's Art Competition, held in 2002 in Dhaka, Jakarta, Kathmandu, Manila, Phnom Penh, Port Moresby, and Ulaanbaatar. More than 70 NGOs cooperated for this event. Each child added her/his comment to the artwork. For example, a 13-year-old girl of Kathmandu says, "If I had the chance, I would stop all fighting and ensure equal rights for all."

Of the more than 1,000 children who participated in the Second ADB Street Children's Art Competition in 2002, a few—including eleven-year-old Riyan from Jakarta—offered a poem as well as a picture:

I am sad because I am a tramp, not like others,
I am going to sing a song.
In a part of me I ask myself the question
Who am I? And I ask myself why,
For what purpose am I born?
The question why and for what purpose I am born.⁽⁶⁾

Riyan's haunting question "For what purpose am I born?" is one facing millions of impoverished children in the cities and towns of Asia and the Pacific—often alone, without help from parents, family, or society.

At the end of the book are carried interviews with 100 children who joined the Art Competition and their photographs. In their own words, the children reveal that they themselves

are most knowledgeable about the factors that first placed them on the street and the difficulties of survival. Many of these children, like Riyan, do not know yet who they are. But they do know who they would be, given the chance.

My teaching plan using this book is composed of five parts. First, the class is divided into groups of 3 to 4 students. Each group is given photocopies of 6 pictures I chose from the book *If I Had the Chance*. All the students look at the 6 pictures and discuss what they like and why they like it with the group members. After the group discussion, each student announces which one s/he likes best and why s/he likes it showing the picture to the class.

As one example of the six pictures, I would like to introduce one painted by Endang Suming-sih, a 16-year-old girl in Jakarta. If she had the chance, she would own an apartment where she could invite the homeless to live with her. As a young girl, Endang was abused by her father, so she left home and lived on the streets. There, she says, she saw children swept away by floods, a scene that she depicted in her drawing and one that she often features in her poetry. She says that because she is now living in an NGO shelter, she has time to write poetry and music, and to make a living as a musician. This includes boarding a bus each afternoon and for the next six to eight hours, singing to passersby for money. She says she tries to save her daily earnings of about 10,000 rupiah (US\$1.00).⁽⁷⁾

Then in the lesson, comes a role-play activity. Each student chooses someone in the pictures, pretends to be the person and says something in English. For example, a student can pretend to be a drowning child in Endang's picture and say, "Help me! I'm drowning!"

Each group is given a blank world map. Students cooperate and find the cities where the children live. They match the name of the city and its country, locate the country of each child in the world map, and color it. The whole class checks the countries and their locations.

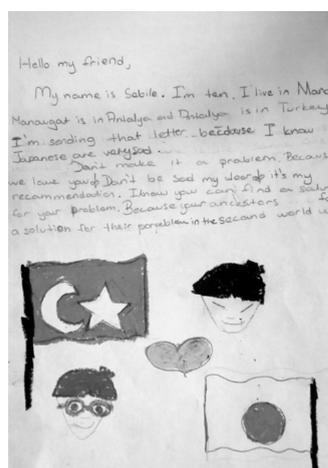
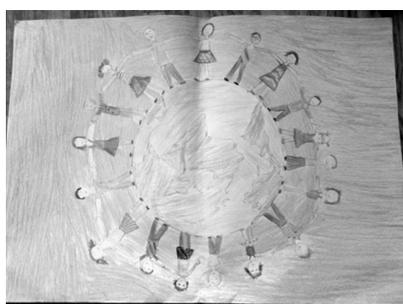
As the final activity, each student is given a worksheet which has information of each child's dream written in easy English. The teacher reads each dream, and the students listen and guess whose dream it is. They compose some easy English sentences to tell how old each child is and where she lives.

The next stage of my original plan for project-based learning about Asia is that students appreciate pictures and letters of encouragement from Turkish children. Some are just pictures and others are with English messages from one short sentence to a paragraph. Short messages are



Picture drawn by an Indonesian girl

easy and appropriate for young learners: “We love Japan,” “We are friends,” “We are with you,” “We are on your side,” “You are not alone,” “Please smile,” “Don’t worry.” The long passage in the following letter goes like this: “Hello my friend, My name is Sebile. I’m ten. I live in Manavgat. Manavgat is in Antalya and Antalya is in Turkey. I’m sending this letter because I know Japanese are very sad. Don’t make it a problem because we love you! Don’t be sad, my dear! It’s my recommendation. I know you can find a solution for your problem because your ancestors found a solution for their problem in the Second World War.”



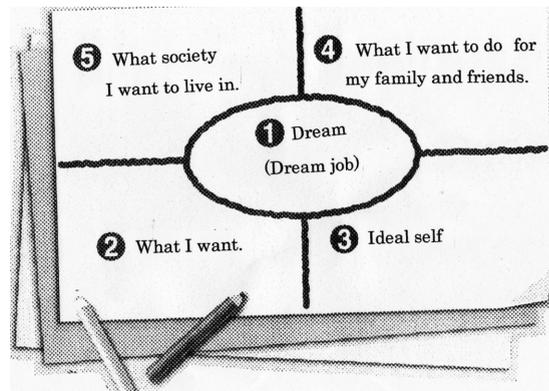
Picture letters from Turkish children

When I forwarded the Turkish picture letters to a friend of mine who teaches English to children in an affected area by the Tohoku Earthquake, her students appreciated them and said they would help foreign people when they were in trouble. I conveyed their message to the Turkish teacher, who was very much pleased.

I also sent Turkish letters of encouragement to high school students in the most devastated area in Miyagi. They wrote thank-you letters to Turkey in return. One student who had her house swept away by the tsunami wrote that she would get over the hard times. The Japanese students at my university also wrote thank-you letters to Turkey and made a video letter with me. My students were happy to learn about Turkey and impressed that they could use English when communicating with Asian people. Turkey also has a lot of earthquakes, so they have sympathy for Japan. On October 23rd in 2011, a huge earthquake occurred in the eastern part of Turkey. My students and some students in Tohoku wrote letters to encourage Turkish people. I sent them to Turkey. All communication was done in English.

In the final step, students think of their dreams to contribute to the world as global citizens. Some students may find it difficult to decide on their future jobs. It may be helpful to use a “dream

map”, which was introduced in an article in a Japanese newspaper. They begin with what they want to do for their family and friends. If they imagine what they want or what society they want to live in when they get their dream jobs, they will realize the importance of world peace. They will think of what they can do now and start taking actions for their dreams. As the end-product of this project-based learning, students can make presentations about their dreams showing their dream maps in English.



“Dream Map” from an article in the *Asahi* Newspaper dated May 29th, 2011.

6. Experiencing Asia

When students learn about Asia, it would be ideal that Asian guest lecturers are invited to the class as cultural informants. Asian residents living in Japan are on the increase, and the number of students whose mothers are from Asian countries is also increasing. These mothers can be invited to the class.

I could suggest that students can visit Asian Rural Institute located in Nasu, Tochigi to talk to young Asian leaders engaged in farming and studying. These leaders stay in Japan for a year and go back home to contribute to their own communities. If students can join study tours in Asia, it is even better. At my university, some students and teachers experienced an eco-tour in Laos together. One of my graduate students participated in a volunteer tour to interact with unprivileged children in Thailand last year. Six months later she joined a 53-day boat trip with 300 youths from ASEAN countries. It is an official program named SSEAYP (Ship for South East Asian Youth Program) sponsored by the Japanese government. During this trip, she made a lot of Asian friends and discussed a number of significant issues with them in English. It motivated her to major in development studies. Professor Kip Cates at Tottori University organizes “Asian Youth Forums” every year so that young people from various Asian countries can get together and discuss important issues. Professor Kazuya Asakawa at Tokai Gakuen University organizes a study tour to the Philippines every year. A student of Hiroshima University who participated in a study tour for youths learning about peace in the Philippines wrote as follows:

This workshop made me think about peace deeply with a fresh viewpoint. Peace has a lot of definitions, which vary and can be vague. However, I came to realize that all of us had hope for peace

in common by spending time with Asian youths whose backgrounds were so different from mine. Peace consists in our daily lives. It cannot be made real just by longing for it. Each of us must build it trying to get rid of various barriers which prevent it.

Interaction with Asian youths changed my view of Japan also. When we think of international cooperation or peace, we tend to look out for foreign countries. However, each country has its own social problems, and we must cope with them too. As I knew Asian youths were tackling with their own domestic problems, I noticed that I should pay more attention to our own problems in Japan.

I will study harder to work in the field of conflict resolution in the future. I have realized the importance of knowing social problems we are facing, thinking about them, sharing information and ideas with other people, and starting to take actions. What I have learned in the Philippines and the ties I have made with people here are my precious assets in my life.⁽⁸⁾

This student is correct in the point that most Asian countries have their own domestic problems. Thailand and Cambodia have a conflict over their national border, and military battles caused 18 deaths in 2011. Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Myanmar also have conflicts of national borders and anti-government military forces. Illiteracy rate in India is outstanding. Bangladesh must find a solution for their problem of poverty. China is growing rapidly, but in order to advance to top-tier status they need good governance and more equal income distribution.

If one of the missions of Toyo Gakuen University is to foster global citizens who work actively in the international society, it is essential to send our students to those Asian countries so that they can study the real situations with their own eyes and feel the responsibility of learning.

7. Conclusion

The 21st century is supposed to be the Asian century. The economy of ASEAN countries continues to grow and they aim to become a union four years later. However, as the President of the Philippines said, if each member of ASEAN cannot solve its own problem, ASEAN cannot become one family. There is still a wide gap between the ideal and the reality.

The European Union is a good model for Asia. College of Europe is a graduate school located in Belgium and has produced a number of political leaders who work in the center of the EU. While studying there, students live together in a dormitory and gain their identity as Europeans in addition to their nationalities. Asia should have a similar college which has the same concept because ASEAN nations, Japan, South Korea and China are united in terms of stability of finance, food supplies, and prevention of natural disasters. We must foster Asian citizens who can contribute to the safety, security, and peace within Asia thinking beyond their

national benefits.

As a common language for Asian people, the importance of English is taken for granted. Some Japanese universities teach all the classes only in English, and they are successful in attracting more students from Asia. There are 140,000 overseas students in Japan, and 90% are from Asia. Globalizing Asia needs English. When our students of Toyo Gakuen University learn Chinese in Shanghai, it is taught through English. It means if we send our students to a university in China, they can learn both Chinese and English.

When Japanese students learn English, they should develop logical thinking skills, critical thinking skills, presentation skills, and persuasive skills at the same time. English teachers have to prepare for that and continue their efforts to set up an integrated curriculum of English courses to promote peace education from elementary school to university.

Notes

- (1) <http://www.unescobkk.org/resources/online-materials/multimedia/video/childrens-traditional-games-in-the-asia-pacific-region/>
- (2) http://www.unescoapceiu.org/board/bbs/board.php?bo_table=m412&wr_id=69
- (3) Saito, E. et al. (2009) *New Crown 2*, Sanseido, pp.72-74
- (4) Fukushima, E. (2011) How to teach Lesson 8 in *New Crown 2*, *The New English Classroom No.498*, Sanyusha, pp.32-33
- (5) Togo, K. et al. (2011) *Columbus 21 English Course 3*, Mitsumura Tosho, p.15
- (6) Asian Development Bank (2003) *If I Had the Chance...*, p.76
- (7) *ibid.* p.82
- (8) <http://homepage.mac.com/kasan/ph/miriam06.html>

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