

Teaching Peace and the Atomic Bombings in the EFL Classroom

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Introduction

Since the early 1990s, there have been a number of calls to introduce peace education into English as a foreign language curricula (Fine, 1990; Stempleski, 1993). As the world becomes globalized and conflicts over resources intensify, the place of peace studies in English as a foreign language classrooms has become increasingly important. This essay introduces the way in which peace education can be incorporated into EFL classrooms through the use of literature. In particular, I discuss how students engaged with issues of peace and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in two courses taught at Otemae University and their presentations of their work at the 2014 *Peace as a Global Language (PGL) Conference* at Kobe Gakuin University.

The Place of Peace in an EFL Discussion Course and a Japanese Literature Course

I do not teach a separate course devoted to peace studies. Instead, I have embraced the philosophy espoused by McInnis and Wells (1994) that “peace education is an organic component of foreign language teaching.” I introduced artistic representations of the experience of the atomic bombings in two different courses: *Discussion and Debate* and *Reading Canonical Japanese Literature*. Both are taught as content courses in English rather than as strict EFL courses.

Both classes consist of a group of students with a variety of English levels, although the majority are advanced. Part of the value in the project we did on the atomic bombings and peace was that it allowed each student to completely engage in the course, providing valuable contributions to the dialogue at a level that was appropriate to their language ability.

I introduced the experience of the atomic bomb as a way to encourage my students to begin to engage with peace education. My pedagogical tactics were loosely based on the framework of three stages developed by McInnis and Wells (1994): *awareness*, *assessment* and *action*. In the first stage, knowledge of the problem is essential as the starting point of empathy and understanding of interdependency. I chose to use the Atomic Bombings as examples of tremendous violence that students could easily relate to because they had occurred in Japan. In both courses, we began our study with a basic outline of the history of the bomb as it is taught in Japan and as it is taught in America. We explored the different

narratives and students considered what has been erased or effaced in each country’s version of the events.

Poster Project

In the *Reading Canonical Japanese Literature* course, students were required to choose a literary work while the students in the *Discussion and Debate* course were given more freedom. Thus, students in the latter group chose songs, photographs, and paper cranes as ways to look at the human costs of the nuclear bomb. I gave the students very broad prompts to help them critically engage with the works they had chosen and think about how works about such tremendous violence could actually teach us about peace. Students did not necessarily answer every question, but as guidelines these prompts were helpful.

- ◆ Give the background of your literary work—who wrote it? When?
- ◆ What is the piece about? Give a summary or description.
- ◆ What does the work tell us about Hiroshima or Nagasaki?
- ◆ Why is the work important?
- ◆ What does the work teach us about peace?
- ◆ How does the work contribute to a global discussion of the importance of peace?

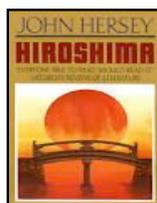
Guided by these questions, students were required to choose the work and present it, together with their analysis of the piece, as a PowerPoint Poster to the class.

Conclusion

Students chose a variety of works, but in every case their choices demonstrated a thoughtful engagement with the material. Several students chose works that had not been translated into English, such as poetry, songs, and newspaper articles. In those cases, students translated the works into English themselves. Furthermore, out of the nine students who completed the project, five attended the *Peace as a Global Language (PGL) Conference* at Kobe Gakuin University on December 7th, 2014 to present their posters and the lessons they had learned. The posters proved to be a way to effectively engage students in both the second and third stages of McInnis and Wells’ peace education platform.

Through choosing and critiquing an artistic representation of the atomic bombing, students not only organized and evaluated information but actively made connections to what the atomic bombings could teach us about peace. Finally, by presenting their posters, first in class and then at a conference, students took a first step toward social action.

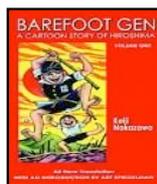
PGL Poster Presentations: Students Respond to Representations of the Atomic Bomb



Student: *Megan Hansen*
 Work Chosen: *Hiroshima*
 Author: *John Hersey*

After presenting my Hiroshima poster at the PGL peace meeting, I was able to develop a new perspective about the Atomic

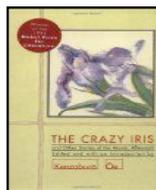
Bomb. As an American, I became more aware of how Japan was affected by the bomb. When I was young, I was taught the bombing was necessary and I grew up believing that. Once I began college and meeting people from all over the world, I began to open up to my surroundings more and began questioning a lot of ideals, or thoughts I grew up believing. The bomb, unfortunately, remained a second thought to me until I came to Japan. Doing this project and presentation really helped to open my eyes to Japan's side of the story and I became more in tune to the true impact of the bomb. In the end, my thoughts on war have changed drastically and I now believe there are better ways to solve disputes, aside from complete annihilation. I want to continue researching such topics and maybe in the future, help aid in further prevention of this type of disaster.



Student: *Shigeru Fukuya*
 Work Chosen: *Barefoot Gen*
 Author: *Keiji Nakazawa*

I learned what children thought and what they did during that time through the book's story. I

don't know why such things as war happen, or why America thought it was really necessary to drop the bomb. *Barefoot Gen* taught me many things. This story is about war and children at that time. This book teaches you what war really is, what peace really means, and how terrible the atomic bomb was. From attending the conference, I learned that being able to tell what I have learned from this story for myself is an important way to talk about war and spread the message of peace.



Student: *Maako Ishitearai*
 Work Chosen: *Firefly*
 Author: *Yoko Ota*

I chose the story "Firefly." At first I had chosen another story, but because another person

chose the same story, I changed my choice. I think it was a good change for me. I had the opportunity to meet the story that I had never read.

"Firefly" is a short story and it is easy to read. But making the poster was too hard. I thought it was too hard to look at the pictures of the people of Hiroshima. The pictures showed me serious scenes. And it's also hard to tell the message of the story in English. It was difficult to find the English words for telling the messages exactly. The most difficult thing was answering questions from many people at the PGL conference. I didn't have many vocabulary words, so the poster and my presentation became difficult to understand. But the people coming to my poster understood my presentation. I was glad. It was a good experience for me to answer questions in English.

With this presentation, I learned about the importance of peaceful messages. In Japan, in August, many TV stations show us programs about the war. I think it's important. But I think it's necessary that the message is told all the year round. I think Japan must be a model of peace. We must read the books of war and advertise them. The PGL conference was a good chance to do that.

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