

Introduction

In the spring semester of 2013, I taught a small *Media English* class at a women's university in Japan. For the final project, I assigned presentation topics by writing names on slips of paper and having students each draw a slip from my hand. On the slips were written four names: *Daniel Ellsberg*, *Julian Assange*, *Bradley Manning*, and *Edward Snowden*. This project took place shortly before Manning's name change.

None of the students knew any of the names, except for one young woman who had heard the name *Julian Assange*. They immediately seemed curious about the project, and came to class the next week thoroughly prepared and impressively well-versed in the language needed to discuss the topic. It was exciting to watch as, one by one, the presentations were made. It gradually dawned on each student that the people were related, and that they were making a patchwork group presentation.

For each person, the students were asked to consider the following questions:

- Who is he? (Give the background)
- What did he do? (Why is he in the news?)
- What are the two sides or opinions about him?
- What's your own opinion?

For the student who researched Daniel Ellsberg, the questions were slightly different:

- Who is he?
- Why was he in the news?
- How did people feel about him at that time?
- How do people feel about him now?
- What do you think of him and his story?

Below are comments given by the student in their presentations or later in their reflections.

On Daniel Ellsberg

- People's opinion at that time: *People derided him as a traitor and suspected him of espionage.*
- People's opinions now: *He received many awards. Many people have come to regard Daniel Ellsberg as hero of uncommon bravery.*

On Julian Assange

- *I researched about Assange. I did not know he was trying to reveal hidden stories by American government. Throughout studying him, I learned that I cannot just trust one story by a media. I should be critical when reading or hearing news because media*

can be controlled by someone like American government. Therefore I think being critical is very important when we see media.

On Bradley Manning

- *It depends on his working condition and motive for the crime whether Manning is whistleblower or traitor. He was sick emotionally in Iraq because he wrote on Facebook that he was "beyond frustrated with people and society at large" and "Bradley Manning is not a piece of equipment." But such feeling happen to everyone. So, I think he should have had a stronger mind. However, what he did is not necessarily wrong since it should be disclosed that Iraqi civilians and journalists being killed by a US helicopter gunship. Yet, why did he steal so many secrets? Did all of them have to be leaked? The number of secrets he stole makes me suspect that he did it just for a diversion.*

- *At first, the topic was a little difficult because I had not read that kind of news even in Japanese. After the project, I know there are people who have a conflict between right and wrong. An article writes about the person like a criminal but another says he is a hero. So, it is important to compare some articles about the same news.*

On Edward Snowden

- *After doing the research about Edward Snowden, I was really surprised to hear the fact that the US has been putting surveillance on American citizens for a long time. It was really scary to know that the government knows everything what they do in every day life. If the same thing happens to us here in Japan, or maybe it's already going on, I really have no idea, but I don't think I will want to make any phone calls or send messages to anyone unless I know it's safe. I agree that the government should know any acts of terrorism in some way but I think what the government did is too much.*

It would be an understatement to say that the project was a success. The students were brilliant, self-assured, and ultimately knowledgeable about a topic and vocabulary previously unknown to them. They expressed an interest in keeping informed of the news at the completion of the course, which was an inspiration for me.

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