

Ethical English: A Powerful New Tool for World Peace

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Abstract

In order to achieve a more peaceful, truly unified world, each of us has to be a global citizen who can think logically, behave ethically, and communicate well with others in English. This paper aims to introduce the subject “Ethical English” as a powerful new tool to teach Japanese students to become global citizens, describe what the three authors have been doing to make this a full-fledged subject under the framework of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and argue its significance and benefits.

Key Words: Ethical English, global citizens, world religion, extensive reading, CLIL

1. Introduction

In the ever increasingly globalized world, can we say that the Japanese have also truly become globalized? Are they actively contributing toward a more peaceful world? Unfortunately, the answer to both of these questions is “No.” There are two main reasons why.

One is that compared with the peoples in many other developed countries, overall the Japanese are still very poor at communicating in English. Even though they study English for about eight years before they graduate from university, most of them are unable to get their ideas across to anyone who doesn’t speak Japanese. We believe that their lack of proficiency in English arises from inadequate TEFL methods in Japan.

Secondly, the Japanese have a difficult time feeling a connection with anything that occurs outside the bounds of their archipelago; they often (but not always) do not care about what is going on with the world and its citizens. The gap between the problems of the world and daily life in Japan is so large that such problems are viewed as irrelevant. We attribute the cause of this general disinterest to a lack of identity as global citizens.

We believe that the best way to both increase English proficiency and foster an awareness of world affairs in Japan is to establish a new discipline entitled “Ethical English.” Literally, it should be understood as an interdisciplinary subject that melds both Ethics and English. It is

a form of CLIL¹, content and language integrated learning. The primary goals of Ethical English are to help Japanese students evolve into global citizens, and give them the tools they need to ethically participate in and communicate throughout the world. In short, Ethical English will help Japanese students “think and behave globally.” In this context, to “think and behave globally” means to think ethically as one of the world’s citizens.

Although the three author’s scholarly concentrations vary from one another, our basic attitudes toward education are the same. Therefore, we decided to cooperate on this article. To that end, it’s now necessary to explain our respective practices. Mr. Kunishige uses extensive reading and moralistic materials and stories in his English classes. He will lead off this article, discussing the effects his innovative teaching method has on his students. Mr. Johnson, a native English speaker, teaches classes on communication skills as well as on world religion. He will write second in this article and will highlight the necessity for the Japanese to start to “think and behave globally.” He will also explain how his classes attempt to achieve this goal. Mr. Ogawa will conclude this article, emphasizing the benefits of teaching Ethics in English, which he has already seen as well as foresees. In the end, we will propose that Japan should start to teach English and Ethics in the context of our proposed new subject, “Ethical English.”

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2. A first step towards a successful Ethical English curriculum

2. 1. Goals of English language teaching

There is no doubt getting students to communicate more effectively in English is one of the principal purposes of teaching English in Japan. To improve their English speaking abilities, students have to be both highly motivated and interested in studying English. To realize this desirable situation, I've been using a method called "Extensive Reading" (ER)² in my English classes for more than three years. As Kunishige et al. (2011a)¹ and Kunishige (2011b)² demonstrate, this method can increase students' interest in English and boost their motivation to study. The result is increased English proficiency.

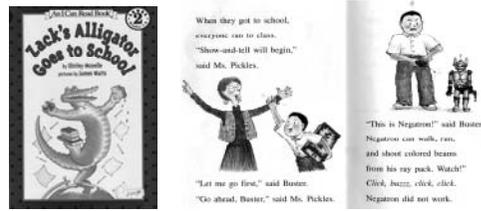
At the same time, it is also a very important mission of an English language teacher to connect the students to the world outside Japan. While doing so, the teacher also has the unique chance to encourage students to be ethically minded people with a global mindset. In order to achieve these goals, I've introduced "English with an Ethical Flavor" (EEF) into my English classes.

The following two sections describe what ER and EEF are.

2. 2. What is ER?

ER is defined as a method of reading as many level-appropriate English books as possible. It is important that the skill level of the book allows the reader to comprehend the material smoothly and fluently, without translating anything into Japanese.

As pointed out in Liana's Extensive Reading Journal³, this method "lets you get used to reading more complex sentences with ease, reinforces the words you already know and helps you learn new words from context." Most books used for ER, especially those intended for beginners, are short, simple picture books as shown below:



Therefore, learners can read through an entire book quite easily, which gives them a sense of achievement. In several cases it even makes them feel an irresistible desire to read more books. By reading more and more books, both their interest in English and their English proficiency increase.

2. 3. What is EEF?

EEF is a way of teaching English with study materials focused on age-relevant issues that encourage students to make ethical considerations. Take a look at the following examples:

(Letter 1) I hate going to school, because I am being bullied every day. There is a gang of boys who threaten me, and sometimes hit me. They always take my pocket money, and they steal my books and hide my bag. My friends have stopped going around with me, because they don't want to be bullied, too. I have told the teacher, but he says I must learn to stand up for myself. Please help me.

(Letter 2) All the other boys in my class are finding girlfriends, and talking all the time about different girls they have dated, and others that they like. But I am different, because I do not have a girlfriend, and I don't think about girls in that way. Actually, I get crushes on other boys, and imagine myself holding a boy in my arms. So there it is: I'm gay, and I don't know what to do next. I don't have the courage to tell anyone, at least not yet. But I feel isolated, and kind of helpless.

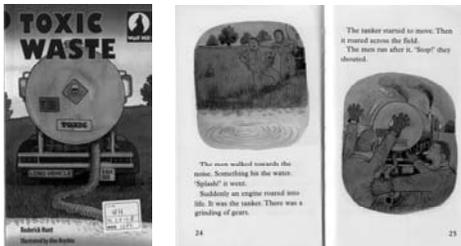
These are letters from teenagers sent to the advice section of a magazine. Clearly, ethical issues are contained in their troubles.

I used this material for an English

conversation class with students who were in their early twenties. I got them to read the letters and discuss the dilemmas presented in groups of 4 or 5 students by asking the question, “What advice would you give them?”

In order to do this, the students all have to step into the teenagers’ shoes and come up with ethically plausible solutions. Through this kind of activity, they practice seeing other people’s problems as their own and solving them. All the while they are speaking, thinking, and reading English. Thus they not only receive their daily English lesson, but also nurture a positive attitude toward the outside world and develop their ethical sense.

I also often recommend students to read books whose stories include ethical issues. As Joseph Campbell highlights repeatedly in his book, *The Power Of Myth*⁴⁾, many of the stories the world treasures the most are filled with ethical lessons. It is not as difficult as one may imagine to find an ethical story, but rather what’s important is that the teacher points out the ethical aspects and dilemmas of the story to the students. ER books used in an EEF classroom are always presented in just such a manner. The following is an example of a story with an Ethical Flavor:



This story describes how the characters stop bad people from dumping toxic waste into the river once and for all.

2. 4. ER and EEF as a springboard towards Ethical English

Ethical English is a subject where major western and eastern philosophical concepts, principal religions, and issues related to environment, biotechnology and so on are taught and discussed in English. While EEF does not dive deep into these issues, the course described by Mr. Ogawa later in this article surely does.

In order to comprehend his class on both a linguistic and ethical level, it is optimal for students to first get their feet wet with easier, more tangible material. In this sense, ER and EEF are both important to the success of Ethical English because they can bridge the gap between students’ low English ability and unfamiliarity with ethical matters and full-fledged Ethics taught in English.

3. A methodology for creating global citizens out of EFL students in Japan

3. 1. The necessity for EFL students to view themselves as global citizens

When teaching English in Japan, a constant problem a teacher encounters is unmotivated students. Part of the reason is that the students often see themselves as solely Japanese, as opposed to members of the global community. Since speaking their native tongue is enough to get them through the day, “Why study English?” is a question often heard.

However, the view that an individual student is “only Japanese” is mistaken at best, and a complete fallacy at worst. As it has been said for many years now, “The world is getting smaller and smaller.” And the trend is continuing at an exponential rate. The need for the Japanese to view themselves as actors on a world stage will pass from a choice into a necessity in the next ten years at most. If the Japanese population continues to view themselves as only Japanese, they will continue to place a low value on English. If a low value is placed on English, it will become increasingly difficult to continue contributing to and benefiting from the global community. Thus, it is imperative that Japan seeks to develop global citizens.

3. 2. We are more the same than we are different

With the best intentions, culture and EFL classes taught in Japan often emphasize the differences between Japan and the rest of the world. However, this is a step in the wrong direction. Emphasizing differences emphasizes separateness. Separateness decreases the students’ desire to learn English. On the other hand, in my classes I try to incorporate lessons

that demonstrate the many similarities between Japanese and non-Japanese.

A class taught by a foreigner is a necessity for a solid Ethical English curriculum. While all three authors reside in Japan, I differ from my co-authors in that I was born in the US from Anglo-Saxon parents. This unique social position allows me to bridge the perceived cultural gap quite easily. If Japanese teachers only teach Ethical English, the result will be a class of valuable theory with little application. It is the role of the foreign teacher to create an environment where students can readily see themselves as global citizens. Often the methods to create just such a perception are more commonplace than one would imagine.

3. 3. Demonstrating the shared nature of pain and pleasure among global citizens

“My boss and I got in an argument today. Sometimes she just drives me crazy.” I make a point to say something akin to this at least once in every business English class I teach. While some might say that I am acting unprofessional, my timed complaint is very didactic: it creates a connection. The reaction of most business students is usually very similar. First a small smile spreads across their faces, and then their eyes open up in understanding. Being shy, they don’t say it, but the look in their eyes is clear, “This foreigner has the same problems as me. He is like me.” A first step is thus made towards EFL students seeing themselves as global citizens. In other words, while skin color and speech may be different, we all go through the same trials and tribulations.

Naturally, not all my conversations are negative in nature. Another chance to create a stronger global identity in students arises when one asks me the question, “What is your favorite food?” Sadly, most students expect me to say either pizza or hamburgers. But I tell them the truth: “My favorite food is *Wakame Udon*.” Younger students giggle, older students look shocked. No matter the age group, the idea that foreigners like the same food as Japanese has now been placed in their minds. It is only a few more mental steps for the students to realize that what they thought was something strictly enjoyed by Japanese is actually enjoyed the world over.

In other words, the students come to understand seaweed and white, fluffy noodles are not just Japanese food, but global cuisine. And as the saying goes, “You are what you eat.”

3. 4. Tailored lessons

Much has already been written on adapting lessons to students’ desires and targets. A simple visit to the EFL section of any major bookstore in Japan elucidates this fact. However, one type of simple EFL lesson is often overlooked: one that the student can *truly* envision using when communicating with a foreigner. It’s this step of “envisioning” that needs emphasizing here. When a student easily recognizes possible, personally-relevant English he will one day use to communicate with an English speaker, he becomes much more motivated to continue to learn.

It is of the utmost importance that Japanese students have the chance to use this tailored English with a foreign teacher in the Ethical English curriculum. For when a student uses his envisioned English in a conversation with a foreigner, the student’s dreams become a reality. By expressing himself to a person from another country in exactly the way they want to, the student has taken another small step towards seeing himself as a global citizen.

3. 5. Teaching about the world’s religion in English

Recently, a national university has been implementing “English only” courses into its curriculum. I have been fortunate enough to be part of this process. One part I play is teaching a course titled “World Religion.” In this course, students are exposed to the many similarities and interesting differences between belief systems from around the world. More so than any other class I have taught, I have witnessed changes in students’ self-identity. Simple things like learning that Sakyamuni Gotama was originally a Hindu before he started a philosophy (Buddhism) that spread all the way to Japan and beyond has an immediate and noticeable impact on students. They can readily see how belief systems that have shaped Japanese culture are related to beliefs both from Hinduism and beyond. These lessons strike deep into the core of creating a global

identity. They offer factual information that proves to students that they are indeed part of a global history. One over-arching theme of the course is that practically all religions emphasize compassion and kindheartedness. Hence, not only are global citizens created, but morally grounded ones as well.

Naturally, the question arises: “Why not teach this class in Japanese from a Japanese teacher? The students will understand it better.” However, offering such a class in English from a non-Japanese global citizen, forces students to subconsciously think and contemplate their self-identity in the world language. The language that tribes in Colombia use to communicate their beliefs to the world is English. The language that Catholic priests from around the world use when they meet is English. It follows that English is the language the Japanese can use to transmit the valuable lessons for respect and harmony of nature that Shinto embodies as well. If the Japanese are to exchange information about the similarities between their beliefs and others’ from around the world, English *has* to be the base language. Furthermore, they will be communicating with people from other countries. Thus, they might as well start doing just that as soon as possible.

3. 6. A real-world example on the benefits of global citizenship as self-identity

In 2013 more yellow sand and more pollution came to Japan from China during the early spring than ever before. Even for Japanese citizens who don’t speak any English, it was a very good reminder that the world’s problems are their problems as well. Through mass suffering of maladies attributed to poor air quality, the entire country became aware that they are not nearly as isolated as they think.

While many living in Japan throw up their hands and say, “Come on China, fix your problems on your own,” a few researchers at a large industrial company in Japan were inspired. They came to realize that China is encountering the same industrial pollution issues that Japan encountered roughly 40 years ago. This company has decided to not only increase their business revenue, but also help China clean up their air pollution. One motivating factor for

this decision was the realization that the countries are not as separate as were previously believed. They have come to understand that as global citizens they have a duty to spread responsible manufacturing processes not only to China, but also throughout the developing world. This company and its employees are also fully aware that the only way to do this is through English. Therefore, their desire to help the world also helps them improve their English: a vital tool for international business. If either their self-identity remained nationalistic or they chose to try to conduct business in Japanese, the company’s targets would fail and global air quality could not be helped by their expertise. By teaching these employees how to use English to instruct Chinese companies to alter their industrial facilities so that the world can literally breathe easier, both the students’ identities as morally responsible global citizens are strengthened, and their English ability increase as well. Two birds are killed with one stone!

4. The benefits of Ethical English

4. 1. What is Ethics as a subject?

First of all, we need to clarify the meaning of ethics. Ethics is a set of rules in a community. At my school we have our own ethics. At my friend’s school they have their own set of ethics. While undoubtedly there are many similarities between the two, the ethics will be slightly different because they are made in separate communities. As Aristotle pointed out in his *Nicomachean Ethics*⁵⁾, Ethics originates from habits. Habits are formed in the community.

Then what do we mean when we say “Ethics” (We write “Ethics” when it means a subject.) as a subject? It is a method intended to develop ethics in the community we belong to. In other words, we study how to be ethical in the community through “Ethics.”

In order to effectively create ethical communities, various ethical theories are taught throughout the world. They include western philosophy, eastern philosophy, religions and other relevant fields. Mainly western philosophy is taught because it remains the most prevalent, logical methodology for examining ethical issues worldwide. Logicity and

universality are the most important factors in making a code of conduct since the goal is to persuade *every* member of the community to go along with the system. It is important to use logic as opposed to belief and faith. When creating global citizens, persuasion through the same faith cannot succeed in every culture, and can actually become destructive. However, as each human has the potential to understand a logical argument, western philosophy is best suited for creating ethically grounded global citizens.

Furthermore, due to its accessibility (practically all western philosophy is available in an English version) and to its relevance to the world at large, it can be called more universal than other philosophies. Even though the world is said to be “shrinking” we still don’t all *personally* know *exactly* who belongs to or will belong to our community. Thus when considering the global community and the importance of universality, it makes the most sense to use an ethical system that is easily accessible to communities across the globe.

Communities come in all sizes, big and small. Even a single classroom can be called a “community”. We teach Ethics in class by allowing students to discuss a topic with various possible viewpoints and courses of action. This is one of the best ways to learn how to make an ethical rule through real world practice. However, if the same topic were discussed in English inside a Japanese classroom, it would be more sensible. This sensibility arises from two key features English shares with western philosophy: logicity and universality. This means that English is the most suitable language for discussing and implementing ethical theories. This is the reason why we propose to teach Ethics in English.

4. 2. On my practice

Let me explain exactly what I currently do in my class. I started to teach Ethics in English one year ago. Prior to that, I taught the same subject in Japanese, so I had to change the course materials. But basically I teach the same contents as I used to teach. The only difference is the language used to instruct. In Japan, Ethics is taught to high school students for one year.

Sometimes it is a mandatory subject, other times it’s an elective. In my college, it is a one-year mandatory subject and is taught for 100 minutes a week.

When the semester starts, I greet the students in English and pass out an Ethics textbook written in English. As the course progresses, whenever I read or have the students read a section of the book, I write a synopsis of the topic on the board. I also explain the meaning of some technical words and difficult expressions. Secondly, I ask a few questions about what I explained in order to confirm the students’ comprehension. Finally, I introduce a current issue related to the topic at hand. Just like in Mr. Kunishige’s class, the students can then apply what they learned to the real world issues that concern them directly.

Throughout this practice, students learn many major philosophical concepts including dialectics, existentialism and the concept of “general will,” all the while studying English as well. Even though my students come from Japan, the most difficult part of this process is teaching eastern philosophy in English. However, this step is very important in creating global citizens. It is important for students to realize that the philosophy of the east holds value just like the philosophies of Germany, France, or any other country. When they study eastern philosophy in English, they both consciously and subconsciously recognize that their ideas and the ideas of their ancestors offer insight into how to become better global citizens. Furthermore, since they studied these ideas in English they can share them with other global citizens who are also striving for a better, more ethical world.

4. 3. The universality of Ethics

As the purpose of this paper is to show that learning Ethics in English can create ethical global citizens, I want to solidify the three main reasons for such a course. As it has been discussed above, one reason is that western philosophy is a main element of Ethics, which is more easily explained in English. The second is that English is more suitable for logical thinking than Japanese. The third is that English is the global language.

Regarding the first reason, western

philosophy is originally written in European languages including French, German and English. Most European languages have a similar grammar structure due to being historically and linguistically based on Latin. Thus, translating from French to English makes more sense than from French to Japanese. Furthermore, vocabulary is also more similar between European and English languages; fewer translating errors are likely to occur.

Regarding the second reason, English expressions are clearer than Japanese ones, which have a deserved reputation for being vague. The students can more readily, logically understand ethical ideas when presented in English. Furthermore, they can later convey their ideas to all global citizens.

Regarding the third reason; since English is the most prevalent language, it is realistic to use it when discussing common ethics.

In short and in conclusion, the basic universality and logicity of English is beneficial for Ethics.

4. 4. The significance of teaching Ethics in English

There are four important benefits for teaching Ethics in English. The first is that students can learn English from a different perspective. They tend to think English is only a subject when it is just studied in English class. Clearly English is *much* more than a subject in school. Teaching Ethics in English shows students how English is a tool for expanding knowledge and international communication. The second benefit is that the Japanese will be able to present Japanese ethics to the rest of world. After all, Ethics inherently includes Japanese ethics. When Japanese ethics are studied in English, there is no need for later translation and possible miscommunication. The third one is that students can discuss ethical matters with foreigners more readily if they know the correct English expressions of western ethics. The fourth and most important benefit is that we can cultivate students' global attitudes. Once the students truly come to grasp the idea that they are studying the same subject as high school and university students around the globe, and in the same language, a common bond is formed. It is even possible to call this bond the start of a

global community of ethically minded individuals.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of our research project is to set up within the framework of CLIL a new subject in which Ethics and English are taught in combination with each other.

The authors all believe that through this new subject Japanese students can effectively nurture and develop an ethical mind, a global mindset, and English proficiency simultaneously. They have already seen and foreseen such results, though on an empirical basis.

What remains to be done is to assess and hopefully confirm the efficacy of Ethical English by carrying out a numerical analysis of how the students have changed after taking the lessons.

Notes

1. CLIL is a term created by David Marsh and Anne Maljers in 1994 and it stands for content and language integrated learning. It is a new methodology that puts emphasis on teaching both the subject and the language equally. Refer to Sasajima (2011)⁶⁾ and Coyle et al. (2010)⁷⁾ for more details on CLIL.
2. Refer to Takase (2010)⁸⁾ and Sakai and Kanda (2005)⁹⁾ for more information on English extensive reading.

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