

Shin-Eiken and Peace Education in English-Language Classrooms

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Dear Teacher,

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmans. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

—Haim Ginot (1972)

The point of this poem is that the separation of knowledge and humanity invites tragedy. Knowledge is important only if it makes people more human. For this reason we believe that school subjects and peace education should be integrated.

Shin-Eiken—a Grassroots English-Language Teachers' Association

Shin-Eiken, or the New English-Language Teachers' Association, is a nationwide organization of about 1,000 foreign-language teachers in Japan. It is not under the guidance of the national government as some other teacher organizations are, but arose from the zeal of Japanese teachers of English.

Shin-Eiken was founded in 1959, inspired by the ideals of the Japanese Constitution—peace, democracy, freedom, justice, and the pursuit of happiness. Shin-Eiken aims to clarify the goals of foreign-language education and foster democratic English education. Shin-Eiken teachers want to see every student become proficient in English and globally minded. We believe that international understanding and global awareness are indispensable for world peace.

We take into account the difficulties and needs of students when we create teaching ma-

terials and methods based on our experiences, studies, and discussions of local and global perspectives. Shin-Eiken teachers seek to help students use English in their daily lives.

Good peace education materials should move students, encourage them to think and express themselves, and also motivate them to study hard.

Shin-Eiken teachers have adopted and discarded many kinds of materials over the years, keeping the most useful ones. We have developed and published many materials. High-school textbooks we have developed include the *World*, *Cosmos*, and *Atlas* text series, approved by the Ministry of Education.

Shin-Eiken members have also developed supplemental readers such as *Little Da in Vietnam*, *Barefoot Gen*, *Okinawa*, *The World Heritage*, *Beyond Silent Spring*, *Visas for 6,000 Lives (The Story of Sempo Sugihara)*, and *Annon Korea!*

Shin-Eiken has also promoted student-centered teaching methodologies. For example, *Jiko-Hyogen* (Self-Expression) emphasizes the

importance of having students express their thoughts and opinions. We have also widely used group- or cooperative-learning methods, encouraging students to participate in class.

Shin-Eiken uses many approaches to peace education. In the 1980s a peace message campaign was waged among foreign travellers. Students have written peace letters to government leaders, made peace speeches in class, and read peace declarations at school festivals. In the 1990s human rights, indigenous people, development education, global education, and the environment were discussed in classes more often than ever.

Many teachers correspond with their international counterparts, using e-mail, letters, and postcards, and participating in Life-Link activities around the world.¹

Teachers edit *Shin Eigo Kyoiku Kouza* (The New English Classroom Course), a widely circulated monthly educational magazine for English and other language teachers.

Discussion Groups

Shin-Eiken has 10 discussion groups at its annual conference, where teachers exchange classroom experiences and lesson examples. Local chapters have bimonthly meetings. Here is some information about the discussion groups from the Shin-Eiken homepage.²

Group 1: Creative use of textbooks and development of original materials

We have created a lot of student-centered materials based on our ideals and the students' needs. We discuss how to deal with textbooks, what materials are best for students, and why and how to use self-made materials.

Group 2: Developing critical reading ability

We show how students can be encouraged to read textbooks and be moved by reading. We promote reading approaches that intensify

the experience, such as group discussions and relevant questioning.

Group 3: Teaching English grammar meaningfully and effectively

While understanding basic grammar and sentence structure is important, we should teach them effectively rather than force students to memorize grammatical rules. Grammar must be taught in a context that is meaningful and useful.

Group 4: Listening and speaking

We discuss English sounds and how to teach them. We examine ways to teach students to read aloud and speak with confidence, using various audiovisual aids such as songs, videos, movies, speeches, phonics, and dramas.

Group 5: English proficiency and its evaluation

To foster English ability and individual development, we discuss how to teach and evaluate students to encourage them, and offer concrete goals at each stage.

Group 6: Fostering learner autonomy through cooperative learning

We encourage cooperative learning to promote students' understanding, motivation, and joy in learning, and inspire students to learn independently. We also examine how to teach beginners' classes, consider what materials are good for group learning, reflect on the role of classroom newsletters, and examine the relationship between school events and English teaching.

Group 7: Helping slower learners

We clarify the meaning of "slower learners" and find ways to teach them effectively. We have seen how such learners begin to study enthusiastically when they come across interesting materials and have supportive peer groups. Our

main concern focuses on how to assess the needs of individual students and help them achieve their goals.

Group 8: Fostering student self-expression

We encourage students to express their thoughts and feelings orally or in writing, and thus develop a friendly learning community and help students come to value democracy. We lead in promoting self-expression and believe that student-centered teaching is essential in language education.

Group 9: Developing peace, environment, and human rights education

We believe that the main purpose of foreign-language education should be to foster world peace. We examine what materials and methods can inspire students to study and reflect deeply on life. For most people peace connotes respect for life. Peace is a condition that not only entails absence of war but also of poverty, hunger, environmental destruction, discrimination, and violence.

Group 10: Team teaching with native speakers of English

We study how we can better collaborate with assistant language teachers and teach more effectively. We discuss how to create teaching materials and improve team teaching, testing, evaluation, and extracurricular activities. We also discuss problems in the system.

Classes on 11 September Terrorist and the Retaliatory Invasion of Afghanistan

The attack on New York on 11 September 2001 shocked many people around the world. We believe no one can justify terrorism. However, US forces have retaliated by killing many innocent people in Afghanistan, more than the New York victims. Most Afghan victims were poor and couldn't afford to evacuate. In the wake of

the shock, most Americans supported President George W. Bush's war policies, but some did not and organized protest rallies. A Web site carries slogans and placards from one rally:

War is not the answer.

Our grief is not a cry for war.

War will not bring our loved ones back.

We decided to use these slogans in classes because they are easy to understand and suitable for a wide variety of activities. Material based on these slogans was introduced to the Shin-Eiken list, and more than 30 high-school and university teachers in Japan have used them.

Some teachers had their students choose three or five of their favorite slogans from 10–60, based on classroom hours, student ability, and so on. One teacher used a ranking system to have students decide their likes and dislikes. Others used photos and slides of Afghanistan to educate students about its plight. Still others had students express their opinions in writing about the war, publishing them in class newsletters. A few even sent letters to President Bush. Here are some of my students' comments about terrorism and war:

Nothing is solved through war.

I am against terrorism and war!

Terrorism and war are mistakes that we should never repeat.

Remember the song "It's a Small World."

A World Court decision is needed to solve this problem.

It's true that terrorism is bad, but it is also meaningless to retaliate. And many innocent people will die.

In wars lots of people will die. Do wars justify such deaths?

The victims of terrorism do not want war. War gives us only devastated towns and vanity.

Nothing is gained from war and a lot is lost.

I think to make war is wrong, but the sorrow will not be lightened without the death of the criminal.

One-sided view that wars are wrong will not be accepted by the victims' family members. But I suppose wars will not make any sense.

An American friend sent us a proclamation by a senior high school in Seattle, Washington, USA. We introduced it to students, who were deeply impressed.

September 27, 2001

Dear Fellow World Citizens,

We, the new generation, are reaching out to express to the citizens of the world the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of many people here in the United States and are writing this letter to give our perspective. Please know that the actions of our leaders in response to this tragedy are in sharp contrast to the feelings of many of us living here. Two years ago we made a banner "Hazel Wolf High School, World Without War, Sustainable Environment."

On September 11 we hung it up outside our school again. We believe we should deal with the tragedy of 9/11 in a completely peaceful way. We believe that there are options other than war that can be as effective, such as showering people with kindness, forgiveness, and resources. Or perhaps, if our country chooses war, we ask that for every violent act we commit we could do another act that is an act of peace.

We believe that every human being has the right to a whole life—not a life that is suddenly ended by an act of war or terrorism or a crime. We believe that understanding one another, as cultures, as individuals, as humans is crucial to the process of peace. Helping one another and supporting each other is essential to bringing us together as a planet.

To that end we must support policies and companies working toward planetary environmental responsibility. We believe that the acts of September 11 were acts of terrorism

and crimes. Rather than revenge, let us surprise the world with love and not be blinded by hate. The key to peace lies in the understanding of each other.

The students of
Hazel Wolf High School

We believe that classes where students honestly express their views about what's happening in the world are precious. Such candid exchanges are taking place in many parts of the globe and are a benefit of foreign-language classes. It is a shame that we cannot introduce all the examples of projects by our fellow teachers, but we invite you visit our homepage and participate in more activities yourselves.

Conclusion

In the wake of the 11 September tragedy, some teachers began to doubt that they were accomplishing anything through peace education and wondered whether their efforts were in vain. Yet, these teachers have also been encouraged by their students' candid writings about the prospect of the US attack on Afghanistan. Most students expressed objection to the war and hope for a peaceful solution. Of course, a few approved of the attack. However, we emphasize that every voice must be respected. However difficult it may be, we should foster classrooms where students can express their honest feelings without fear.

In English classes, in particular, we affirm that students should frankly exchange their ideas about various social issues and express their world vision with students from other countries.

Shin-Eiken underscores the importance of going beyond an Anglo-American tunnel vision and connect with other people, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. *Shin Eigo Kyoiku Kouza* offers a popular English interview column, "Countries Around the World," describing various cultures, social customs, and educational systems.

Many discussions are ongoing about how to reform English-language education in Japan. Many tend toward excessive elitism and practicality. The Ministry of Education's (2002) strategic plan to cultivate "Japanese with English ability" is a good example.

It illustrates how pressures to globalize economically influence educational policies. The proposal would stream English education into an elite track for a few while the rest would enter a standard track. The proposal also emphasizes English education, neglecting other foreign languages. This proposal is clearly against the ideals of Japan's Fundamental Law of Education (1947). More and more competition and hierarchy are being introduced under the name of "educational reform." Only three periods of foreign language classes a week are conducted at junior high schools, making effective language learning difficult. An "absolute evaluation" system was hastily introduced in 2002 to replace the "relative evaluation" system. Teachers are now required to adhere to overly meticulous evaluation standards and have less time to focus on teaching. The government is also planning to implement mandatory English teacher-training programs, which would force already-harried teachers to attend during holiday breaks. Such "reform" measures are making it increasingly difficult for teachers to attend to the needs of their students and draw out their diverse interests and abilities.

Shin-Eiken has advocated "English education as education for humanity" and also emphasized the significance of inner motivation. Key concepts of our organization are (i) meaningful, relevant materials for students; (ii) friendly study groups; (iii) students' expression of their feelings and opinions; and (iv) concern for peace, human rights, and the environment. We have learned that foreign-language study becomes humanistic when these elements are combined effectively. We have gathered our fellow teachers' exemplary practices up to the late 1980s, and published 20 volumes of *Shin Eigo Kyoiku Kouza*.

Teachers become isolated when struggling alone to deal with their many troubles. Yet, as the proverb "many hands make light work" attests, we can solve problems with peers and accomplish more by working together. Shin-Eiken is a circle of warm-hearted, reliable teachers who are ready to help teachers and anyone else to improve English education.

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Notes

1. Life-Link Friendship-Schools is an independent non-governmental organization which aims to promote contact and cooperation between young people around the world and their schools, through active participation in shared projects, vital for our time (e.g., Environment, Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Constructive Collaboration). Source: www.life-link.org/go.asp?url=pages/whatis.htm.

2. www.shiramizu.org/~sineiken.