

Discussing and Debating Controversial Issues in English: A framework for a Japanese university seminar

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Abstract

The teaching of controversial global issues in the context of a Japanese university seminar requires a clear understanding of the meaning and concept of a worldview. The careful cultivation of a personal worldview is necessary in order for a young learner to become what UNESCO and Oxfam refer to as a Global Citizen. To do this, we must first consider what makes an issue controversial and worthy of debate and discussion. However, in order to achieve the goal of Global Citizenship, young learners need to acquire the discussion and debating skills and the academic writing skills required to express their worldview effectively.

“Truth is evaded or concealed when it is inconvenient, criminalized when it is ‘insulting’, denied when it contradicts religious beliefs, tampered with when it is in conflict with ethnic or national self-esteem, ignored when it is irritating to the powerful.” Benson & Stangroom (2006)

In their response to growing religious fundamentalism, the challenges of postmodernism and the poverty of multiculturalism, Orphelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom make a powerful case for the importance of *truth*. A common definition, or indeed a common idea of what constitutes the *concept* of truth, debated by philosophers and relativists throughout the ages, is unlikely ever to be agreed upon. Yet, despite its semantic and philosophical encumbrances, Benson and Stangroom point out that truth will always *be* truth.

“Truth is always potentially a stumbling-block, because it is of the nature of truth that it is what it is, regardless of anyone’s wishes. However, because it is the case of it is what it is, in the long run it is generally better to heed it than to ignore it: sooner or later the waves will hit the shore, and it is well to be prepared.” (ibid.)

In a previous paper (Lia, 2014), I made a case for the importance of teaching controversial issues – often sanitized for easy consumption in junior and senior high schools in Japan – to Japanese university students in an English language environment. I also argued that (non-native Japanese) teachers of English were perhaps in the best position to do this. In order for an educator to succeed in the task of teaching complex and controversial global issues, representing the *truth*, to the best of the educator’s ability, is a daunting yet essential requirement.

Introduction

This paper represents the second part of a series of investigations into the teaching of controversial issues in the context of a Japanese university seminar. It is divided into two parts. Part one focuses on the necessity to understand the meaning and concept of a worldview and the nature of controversy. This will be followed by a series of guidelines designed to help students decide if and to what extent an issue might be considered controversial and suitable for debate.

In part two, I shall outline in detail a framework for the teaching of controversial issues in English in a Japanese university environment. In this section, I shall deal with the annotation of a news article and give actual examples of project ideas and materials created and extensively piloted by the author, together with detailed explanations and rationales.

I shall conclude part two with a look at the variety of controversial issues chosen for deeper research by my fourth year English seminar students over the past six years as a basis for their final graduation papers. I believe that the aforementioned framework is responsible, at least in part, for providing my students with both the resources and inspiration to enable them to successfully tackle complex issues with the ultimate aim of developing their research into an English graduation thesis.

Part One: Worldview and Controversial Issues

All aboard the Global Citizenship – Cultivating one’s worldview

The first step towards enabling students to engage in the discussion and debate of complex and controversial global issues in English in their quest to become Global Citizens, is to help them consider some definitions of the term *worldview* and an explanation of its concept.

English Language Seminar: Global Perspectives

Here is a brief outline of the very first task I assign in my English seminar on Global Perspectives.

Students work in groups and are asked to write their own detailed definition of the term *worldview* without using any source of reference. Each group shares its definitions with the other groups in the class leading to an open discussion. Here are some of the most commonly recurring descriptions offered by my seminar students over the years:

“Worldview means how you see the world.”

“The meaning of worldview is what you think based on your experience.”

“Worldview is a person’s opinion about the world.”

“What we believe is our worldview.”

“Worldview means point of view about the world.”

“Your worldview is your beliefs and morality.”

What does world view (world-view/worldview) mean?

Well, here’s an online definition of [world view](#)...

1. The overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world.
2. A collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.

Ref: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

Now let’s look at some of these words in detail.

1. The overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world.

perspective = this means a ‘view’ of something – how we see something and from what position we look at things.

We can look at things from many perspectives: a political perspective, religious perspective, financial perspective, educational perspective, male/female perspective, Tamagawa university student/teacher perspective, married person’s perspective etc....

Can you think of any other ‘perspectives’?

Imagine you get home late and your mother is angry. Perhaps you don’t understand why she is angry... because you are looking at the situation from your perspective. Then you should try to see the situation from her perspective, and maybe you can understand her feelings.

see /interpret the world = it is important not only to ‘see’ things around us, but also to ‘interpret’ them. ‘Interpret’ means understand, infer, make sense of.... So, it is important to ‘see’ things around us, but it is also very important to try to understand the reasons for them and understand their importance and consequences .

By the way, the ‘world’, means anything around us.

Imagine you see an old and hungry homeless person. Of course you feel sorry for him. But you should also try to understand why there is a homeless person in a rich country like Japan. Perhaps the welfare system in Japan is to blame. Perhaps Japanese society doesn’t care... Can’t we do something about it? The Japanese population is getting older. If we don’t help these people, what will happen in the future? etc.

2. A collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.

Some ‘groups’ of people have different ideas.

Why do you think there are so many wars in the world today? What do you think is the main cause of war? Why do people want to kill each other? Perhaps they belong to different ‘groups’ and these groups have a different world view. Muslims and Christians have a very different world view. They are at war in many countries. Arabs and Jews have a different world view. They have been at war for many years in Israel and Palestine. *Can you think of any other ‘groups’ that have a different world view? Do you think the world view of people in Iran is the same as the world view of most Japanese? Why? Why not?*

Figure 1 Understanding the meaning and concept of a worldview

While one would not argue with the basic sentiments of the students' definitions listed above, I pressed my students for a more detailed explanation of some of the key words employed in defining the term *worldview*, such as 'the world', 'opinion' and 'beliefs'. After a lengthy discussion, I offered a brief tutorial of my own. See Figure 1, above..

The key point here is to add substance to the important words within each definition. Terms such as 'perspective', 'view' and 'group' need to be explained in greater detail. Students need to understand that they cannot get away with vague generalizations and must always be prepared to study key terms and concepts more deeply. In order to make the task more communicative, I added some questions after each section for students to consider and discuss.

A key concept that often emerges from discussions with my seminar students about one's worldview is that of personal experience and how this influences our way of thinking. This is a particularly important issue with young impressionable learners. Below is a series of questions I pose to my students in order to stimulate discussion about personal experiences and how these experiences may or may not contribute to the shaping of our character, our behaviour and ultimately our worldview.

Personal experiences

Our worldview is often shaped by events in our lives.

Discuss some of these questions with your partner.

- 1) *Have you ever been abroad? (Where? What were the people like? etc.)*
- 2) *Have you ever been criticised (by a friend, a family member, a school teacher etc.)?*
- 3) *Have you ever been punished for something? (What for? By whom? How did you feel?)*
- 4) *Have you ever been helped by someone? (By whom? How did you feel? etc.)*
- 5) *Have you ever felt terribly sad? (What happened? How did you react? etc.)*
- 6) *Have you ever done anything selfish? (What did you do? Why? How did you feel? etc.)*
- 7) *Have you ever felt physical or emotional pain? (What happened? What did you do? etc.)*
- 8) *Have you ever been to a 'big' event, like a sports event or live concert? (How did you feel after? etc.)*
- 9) *Have you ever broken up or fallen out with a lover or a friend? (Why? How did you feel? etc.)*
- 10) *Have you ever lost a loved one (= has someone you loved died?) (How did this experience affect you?)*

The next step in guiding our students towards the goal of discussing and debating controversial issues is to establish at the outset what it is that makes an issue controversial.

The concept of controversy and what makes an issue truly controversial is often difficult to convey to young Japanese learners. Furthermore, a discussion on what constitutes 'important' controversial issues is equally problematic. One of the aims of the task in the following section is to introduce the element of political and social satire – something young Japanese learners are often not familiar with. Also, the importance of universalizing one's views and beginning to grasp what might be the related themes surrounding the basic issue under discussion. Another essential aim of this task is to begin to empower students with the ability to consider and ultimately evaluate each issue from a variety of perspectives.

So what's the problem? – Introducing controversial issues

Figure 2, below, shows a worksheet with provocative questions dealing with four topical controversial issues. To the right (Figure 3) is an actual sample of a student's initial responses to the questions.

Once students have grasped the basic concept of controversy, they should be encouraged to come up with controversial topics of their own that they would be interested in discussing in class. The following worksheet (Figure 4) is designed to aid students in selecting an appropriate topic for discussion or debate. The guidelines explained in the task emphasize the varying degrees of controversy and specification of debate resolutions.

Monday, April 07, 2014

Controversial issues

Let's start with some common controversial topics...

- 1) Are you in favour of or are you opposed to the **death penalty** (capital punishment)?
- 2) Do you believe corporal punishment is ever **justified**?
- 3) The cartoon was printed in a national foreign newspaper. The Japanese government made a formal complaint and asked for it to be removed from the newspaper. Do you think such cartoons should be banned? Do you find this cartoon amusing or offensive?
- 4) In 2011, France made the wearing of the niqab and burka in public illegal. Do you agree with the banning of the niqab and burka?

Figure 2

Controversial issues

- 1) The death penalty
I am in favour of death penalty after the suspect confessed that all of crime. I think about bereaved families because the victim has n't any fault. They can't believe the murder is living and I also can't believe. To kill someone is not allow but to control murders - death penalty is need.
- 2) Corporal punishment
I think it's okay but it has degree. Nowadays in Japan. Even if a little corporal punishment such as
- 3) Amusing or offensive?
It's offensive. Japanese had a nuclear accident but it's part of Japan. It caused misunderstanding a lot. For example, all of Japanese foods are contaminated of radioactive so they didn't buy Japanese foods. We believed nuclear is not dangerous so much but after that accident, we changed our mind at once. I don't like such people.
- 4) Such cartoons should be banned?
I think it's not be banned. We have freedom of expression. If someone think like this, it should be allow to show.
- 5) France has banned the wearing of the niqab and burqa. I don't agree with this. Because believers can wear original clothes or habits where there are.

Figure 3

Task hint: Words in bold may be boarded and elicited before the paper is distributed. An alternative approach, time permitting, might be to get the students to discuss these key words and phrases and search for definitions.

Figure 5, shows the results of a class survey I conducted on a number of controversial topics including euthanasia, same-sex marriage, drink-driving and the banning of religious symbols in public places. While the majority of students were of the same mind on all the issues (11 or more out of 15), I pointed out that they were probably in the minority when compared to opinions worldwide and suggested that they reflect on the possible reasons why this might be.

The rationale for this type of task is to get students accustomed to looking at each issue from a variety of perspectives in order to understand why others may have differing viewpoints and also to help them realise how inextricably linked controversial issues are to equally important related issues – this is precisely what makes the issues controversial.

The discussion on the banning of religious symbols in schools, for example, led to a discussion about the banning of the burqa in France. This, in turn, raised the related issues of women's rights, freedom of expression and discrimination, but interestingly, in defence of both sides of the argument. For many Japanese students inexperienced in the skill of debating controversial issues, the realization that the same argument can be used in favour of or against a motion was somewhat disconcerting, yet revelatory.

A student perspective on controversial issues

Below is a list of issues deemed controversial by a group of my seminar students. One of the main benefits of eliciting such a list from students rather than distributing a ready-made list of 'classic' controversies, is that it provides material for

Some **guidelines** in choosing appropriate topics for debate.

- The **resolution** must be **controversial**.

Example:

- *Murder is wrong* (this is NOT a controversial statement – it would not lead to an interesting debate)
- *Killing a fellow human being is always wrong* (This is a more controversial statement)
- *Capital punishment should be universally banned* (This is a very controversial statement)

- The resolution should be phrased in a way that there are only two possible responses (Yes/No, I agree/I disagree, True/False, Right/Wrong, etc.) – in this way, we can avoid becoming **fence-sitters!**

- There are **degrees of specification** when making a resolution

Example:

- *Capital punishment should be universally banned* (general)
- *Capital punishment should only be used for the most terrible crimes, such as mass murder and terrorism* (more specific)
- *Drink-drivers should face the death penalty if they kill someone while under the influence* (... even more specific)
- *Killing, not capturing, Osama bin Laden was the right thing to do* (...even more specific)

- It is not necessary to choose a resolution that has **global implications**. In order to **hone** our debating skills, we can also debate more **mundane controversies**.

Example:

- *Men are better drivers than women*
- *Reading real books is better than reading downloaded books on e-book readers*

Figure 4

2014: Controversial Issues – A variety of perspectives

Look at the data from our class survey and discuss the questions. Try to approach each issue from a **variety of perspectives**.

- **Controversial issue:** Euthanasia

Class survey: 12 people agree with the right to die. Only 1 person disagrees.

Question: Why isn't euthanasia common around the world? Why do most countries (and their citizens) disagree with euthanasia?

- **Controversial issue:** Same-sex marriage

Class survey: 12 people agree with the right for gay people to marry. Only 1 person disagrees.

Question: Is same-sex marriage common around the world? Why isn't it legal in Japan? What kind of people disagree with same-sex marriage and why?

- **Controversial issue:** Drink/driving

Class survey: 13 people agree with a zero-tolerance approach to drink/driving. Nobody disagrees.

Question: Why is drink/driving legal in most countries around the world?

- **Controversial issue:** Banning of religious symbols in schools and places of work

Class survey: 11 people disagree with the banning of religious symbols. Only 1 person agrees.

Question: Why did France decide to ban the wearing of the burqa in public places? Why is the wearing of religious symbols in school controversial?

Figure 5

debate that is interesting to the students and more relevant to their lives. It also offers some evidence to indicate whether the students have indeed grasped the concept of controversy and have learned to understand what makes an issue truly controversial.

Your controversial issues

- It should be forbidden for professional women to wear pants at work in Japan.*
- Military service should be introduced in Japan.*
- Money is the root of happiness.*
- Divorce does not harm children.*
- Living alone as a university student is better than living with others or family.*
- Cheating on one's partner should be a criminal offence.*
- Women are better at cooking than men.*
- Plastic bags in supermarkets should be subjected to a substantial fee.*
- Junior high school students should be encouraged to carry a cell phone in school.*
- There should not be a surcharge (higher fee) for late-night taxis.*
- Japan should open its doors to immigrant workers to solve the population decline.*
- Japan should abandon nuclear power.*
- Smoking should be completely banned in all restaurants in Japan.*
- Corporal punishment is sometimes justified.*
- Women-only cars on trains should be abolished.*

- p. All forms of gambling should be banned in Japan.*
- q. Listening to music while cycling should be allowed. (It is prohibited by law in Japan.)*
- r. All school textbooks should be digitalized.*
- s. Married people are happier than unmarried people.*
- t. Alcohol should be allowed on university campuses.*
- u. It is important to have black hair when attending a job interview.*
- v. Japan should have the Bomb (nuclear weapon) as a deterrent.*

Part Two: A Framework for Teaching Controversial Issues

Read All About It – annotating and digging deeper

It is important that students not only read and understand the facts of a story as they are told, but also that they think critically of them. One effective way to do this is to question everything that begs questioning. That is to say, if the article does not explain a fact to the reader's satisfaction, then the reader has a right if not a duty to ask for elaboration or explanation. The first step towards achieving this is by annotating articles.

–Annotating a news story

While many Japanese university students are aware of the shocking reality of stoning, very few have any knowledge of its intricacies. I selected the article below (Figure 6) and added questions of my own in the form of annotations either above or below the text or in the margins. I used this as a model for the type of annotating that I believe can help students as a first step on the way to familiarizing themselves with a controversial issue that they know very little about in a part of the world that is alien to them.

An initial 'shock to the system', I have constantly found this task to be particularly effective and memorable. The article in question is from the BBC news website and deals with the stoning to death of an apparently adulterous Somali woman by the Islamist extremist group known as al-Shabab. This type of article provides ample material for annotated questions such as the following.

- (“A 20-year-old woman divorcee accused of committing adultery ...”) *Can divorcees commit adultery?*
- (“... stoned to death by Islamists in front of a crowd of about 200 people.”) *What kind of people attend stonings?*
- (“Her boyfriend was given 100 lashes.”) *Corporal punishment? Why was his punishment more lenient?*
- (“It is thought to be the second time a woman has been stoned to death for adultery by al-Shabab.”) *Can we know how many times it has really happened?*
- (“The group controls large swathes of southern Somalia.”) *In what kind of places is it possible for a “group” to control parts of a country?*
- (“... a strict interpretation of Islamic law.”) *What kind of law is ‘Islamic law’?*
- *What are the procedures involved in a stoning? Who decides?*
- (“Under al-Shabab's interpretation of Sharia law ... adultery ... punishable by stoning to death.”) *What causes people to behave in this way and to have such beliefs?*
- (“Earlier this month, a man was stoned to death for adultery.”) *Are men also stoned? As often as and for the same reason as women?*
- (“His pregnant girlfriend was spared, until she gives birth.”) *This means?*

Following this annotated model, my students were then asked to annotate a topical news story of their choosing in a similar way. The main purpose of this task is to make students come up with unanswered questions which they will then bring to the classroom and share with their classmates and teacher and ‘dig deeper’ in the hope of finding some answers.

Somali woman stoned for adultery

Can divorcees commit adultery?

A 20-year-old woman divorcee accused of committing adultery in Somalia has been stoned to death by Islamists in front of a crowd of about 200 people.

What kind of people attend stonings?

A judge working for the militant group al-Shabab said she had had an affair with an unmarried 29-year-old man.

He said she gave birth to a still-born baby and was found guilty of adultery. Her boyfriend was given 100 lashes. *Corporal punishment? Why was his punishment more lenient?*

It is thought to be the second time a woman has been stoned to death for adultery by al-Shabab. *Can we know how many times it has really happened?*

The group controls large swathes of southern Somalia where they have imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic law which has been unpopular with many Somalis. *In what kind of places is it possible for a "group" to control parts of a country? What kind of law is "Islamic law?"*

'Lenient'

According to reports from a small village near the town of Wajid, 250 miles (400km) north-west of the capital, Mogadishu, the woman was taken to the public grounds where she was buried up to her waist. *What are the procedures involved in a stoning? Who decides?*

She was then stoned to death in front of the crowds on Tuesday afternoon.

The judge, Sheikh Ibrahim Abdurahman, said her unmarried boyfriend was given 100 lashes at the same venue.

Under al-Shabab's interpretation of Sharia law, anyone who has ever been married - even a divorcee - who has an affair is liable to be found guilty of adultery, punishable by stoning to death. *The Islamists want to impose a strict version of Sharia on Somalia*

What causes people to believe in this way and to have such beliefs?

An unmarried person who has sex before marriage is liable to be given 100 lashes.

BBC East Africa correspondent Will Ross says the stoning is at least the fourth for adultery in Somalia over the last year. *Are men also stoned? As often as and for the same reasons as women?*

Earlier this month, a man was stoned to death for adultery in the port town of Merka, south of Mogadishu. *This means...?*

His pregnant girlfriend was spared, until she gives birth.




Figure 6

-Scanning News Headlines

The BBC news website homepage provides an ideal source for the day's headlines. Below (Figure 7) is a screenshot image saved as a PDF document of the world headlines of December 4, 2014.

To the right of the screenshot is a worksheet designed specifically for the news headlines of that day. A description of the task and an explanation of its principal aims are outlined below. The reasoning behind each step of the task is preceded by the word **rationale**.

-BBC New Headlines: Task description.

Strategy

Students work in small groups. Before engaging in the main task, I ask for a volunteer in each group to act as leader. If one is not forthcoming, the group then elects a leader. The next step is for each group to discuss how the task may be completed in the most efficient, productive and rewarding way.

A typical strategy employed by many students is to assign parts of the overall task to individual members of the group. The results are then shared amongst all members of the group with the leader acting as coordinator.

US: Any Iran strikes on IS positive

the US secretary of state says Iran has military action against ISIL in Syria in Iraq under the 'Operation Inherent Resolve' strategy from an effort to 'set IS leaders' off

Peak performance
Opening doors to the 'mystical' world of magic

In the shadows
The millions left behind by Obama's migrant plan

BBC Headlines: December 4, 2014

Scan the headlines from the BBC website and answer the questions.

Names and Organizations in the news
Who are these people?

Name	Details
(Example) Obama	US president
Eric Garner	
Stefan Lofven	
Hollande	
Boko Haram	

Acronyms and Compounds
Do you understand these acronyms/compounds? Can you explain them?

(Example) US = United States. It's a country.
IS
PM
Farc
WW2
US-Iran
anti-US

International news
Can you find 12 (16?) countries mentioned in these headlines? Write them below.

1. (Example) United States	7.	12.
2.	8.	(13.)
3.	9.	(14.)
4.	10.	(15.)
5.	11.	(16.)
6.		

Cultural awareness
Can you work out what's behind these headlines?

Still suffering: The children of Bhopal bear scars of gas leak 30 years on

In the shadows: The millions left behind by Obama's migrant plan

No entry: What happened to woman trying to drive across Saudi border?

Vigilante power: Attacks provoke men to take up arms against Boko Haram

Scrap collectors: The villagers making money from Beijing's rubbish

Figure 7

Scanning news headlines

The main aims of this task are as follows:

1. Names and Organizations in the news.

Students study the images and scan each headline and the brief summaries of each story to find the key names of the protagonists and organizations involved.

Rationale: The simple reasoning behind this task is to establish the identity of the protagonists of the headline even if they are unknown, or known only by name, to the students. Understanding who the main characters are is a first step in understanding the story behind the headline.

2. Acronyms and Compounds.

A number of acronyms and compounds are listed on the worksheet. The students scan the headlines and locate and mark each of them. The group then attempts to define, explain or make an educated guess as to the meaning of each, depending on individual prior knowledge, context in which each item is used and critical thinking.

Rationale: Headlines, for reasons of brevity, make abundant use of both acronyms and certain compounds such as portmanteau words (medicare, sexting) and prefixed compounds (anti-Iran, anti-US). It is essential, therefore, for students to become aware of the most commonly used acronyms and compounds in order to facilitate their understanding of each story.

3. International news:

The third and final part of the scanning task requires students to make a list of the countries, cities and regions that are mentioned in the headlines.

Rationale: Compiling such a list helps students to understand the global scale and reach of news headlines. Over time, certain regions will consistently appear, suggesting to the students that these regions of the world are particularly newsworthy. An extension of this task is to ask students to identify each region on a world map, thus allowing them to become familiar with world political geography. Such knowledge is essential in order to understand and to be able to evaluate world news.

Upon completion of the main task, I then draw together the findings of each group in an open-class post-task discussion. This provides a number of learning opportunities. The role of the teacher is to encourage critical thinking and to gently guide the students towards the facts, boarding key words and expressions, acronyms and their meanings and other relevant vocabulary where necessary.

Once the facts have been established, the final part of the task is as follows.

4. Cultural awareness

Each group is assigned one of the headlines selected for closer analysis through critical thinking (see Figure 9). It is the group's task to use context (image, title, and headline) together with the students' knowledge of history, geography, religion and culture etc. to explain the story behind the headline as best they can.

Rationale: Naturally, on many, if not most occasions, students do not have the requisite background knowledge to explain the story in precise detail. However, the purpose here, is to at least attempt, through critical thinking and cultural awareness, to establish what is behind the headline and why indeed the story is considered newsworthy.

An extension of this final task is to ask each group to adopt the principal theme of the headline as a target for deeper research in preparation for a class presentation. An example of such a task can be seen below (Figure 8). In this case, I split the class into three groups of five students and assigned to each group one of the main themes from the BBC headlines of December 10, 2014 (marked A, B and C on the image).

The general themes were;

- A. The role of the CIA, in particular in its interrogation of terrorist subjects.
- B. The story of Oscar Pistorius and a possible appeal against his acquittal on murder charges.
- C. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Malala Yousafzai.

For such in-depth research, I allowed the students two weeks to work together to prepare a presentation based on their research.

Rationale: Such type of research allows students not only to establish the basic story behind the headline, but to dig deeper and reveal a number of related themes. In the case of the CIA story, for example, the 'story' is not only about systematic torture used on suspected terrorists, but on terrorism itself. This in turn leads to the related themes of politics, religion, discrimination and human rights, to name but a few.

I will conclude this paper with an outline of the main aims of my English seminar in relation to parts one and two above. I will follow this with a selection of graduation thesis titles from papers successfully presented to The Department of Liberal Arts, Tamagawa University (Tokyo) in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts between 2011 and 2014. The purpose of this list is to demonstrate what I believe to be the effectiveness of the framework I have presented in this paper.

Conclusion – Writing an English graduation paper

Students apply to take my seminar for a number of reasons, but the main language focus is on developing discussion and



Figure 8

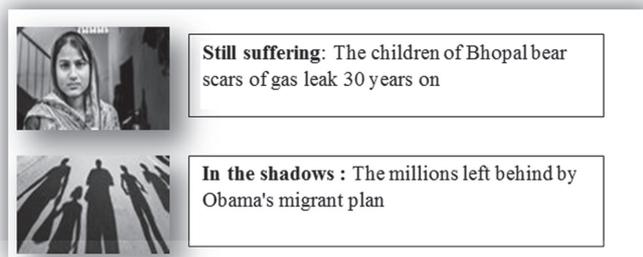


Figure 9

debating skills and academic writing.

Here is a brief outline of the contents of my two-year (four-semester) English seminar: **Global Perspectives**.

The aim (in this seminar) is to help students increase their knowledge and understanding of important world issues and to learn effective ways to express opinions about these issues both orally and in writing. We will discuss and debate many topics including the latest news stories, and view these stories and events from a variety of perspectives; ethical, political, scientific, religious etc.

An essential underlying aim is to help students gain more knowledge about important global issues and to establish, consolidate and learn to express effectively their own worldview in relation to the issues and events that are unfolding around them in the world today.

We will research various topics and themes and learn relevant vocabulary using a variety of sources (internet news articles, movies, newspapers and magazines) and have group and class discussions and formal debates based on our research findings.

Continuing from the first semester (in the second semester) we will take a closer look at politics, ethics, religion and sexuality. For example, we will discuss ethical dilemmas such as the use of nuclear power and stem-cell research; political and social issues, such as same-sex marriage and ties between China and Japan, and religious issues, such as the discrimination against women in Islamic countries.

In the third semester, we shall refine and hone the discussion and debating skills and techniques studied in the previous two semesters. At this point, students will begin choosing their thesis topic based on the issues we have covered, and on related issues.

In the fourth and final semester, students, with considerable help and advice from the teacher, will write an academic research paper on a topic of their choice related to the issues covered in the previous semesters. Students will write their thesis in English.

Selected graduation thesis titles from 2011~2014

In this final section, each thesis title elicits a main theme of research. I have added after each title one or two related fields and topics of enquiry that students were obliged to explore.

Thesis titles 2011

- Where do the stereotypical images that the Japanese have of foreigners come from? A study* (Sociology, culture)
Young Japanese people do not show affection verbally as much as young western people do (Sociology, human behaviour)
Loanwords in daily Japanese language (Linguistics, history)

Thesis titles 2012

- The decreasing birthrate in Japan: The potential consequences of following the French model* (Politics, economics)
Shorinji Kempō: The benefits of its philosophy on Japanese society (Martial arts, psychology, philosophy)
Foreign-language musicals: Are subtitles necessary? (Performing arts, language)
The importance of oral competence in the acquisition of English language proficiency (Education, linguistics)
Home Education: Is it really a bona fide alternative to formal education? (Education, politics, religion)
The US military presence in Japan: Is Japan over dependent on foreign military protection? (Geopolitics, history)
An investigation into the origins and development of superstitions around the world (Religion, history, culture)
Same-sex marriage and why it should be accepted in society (Human rights, discrimination)
Furthering Education for Islamic Women: Creating More Choices through Learning (Religion, human rights)
Brushing away the cobwebs: A revamping of the Japanese education system (Education, politics, history)
Protecting endangered minority languages (Language, culture)

Thesis titles 2013

- Black music in America: A social history of the first Half of the 20th century* (Discrimination, culture, politics)
Nuclear power in Japan: Why do we still rely on it? (Energy, politics, economics)
An investigation into the gun culture of the United States (Culture, human rights, crime)
Inequality in Islamic Societies: A Study of the Plight of Women in Islam (Human rights, religion, equality)
When is it Easy to Kill? : The Ethics of Abortion (Ethics, religion, science)
Democracy: A Comparative Study of Political Ideologies (Politics, history)

Thesis titles 2014

- Why Malala Was Shot: An Investigation Into the Problem of Women's Education in Pakistan* (Religion, women's rights)
Sex Education in Japan: Finding the best way (Sex education, sociology, politics)
Following the German Model: Ecology in Germany and Japan (Ecology, economics)
After Fukushima: Japan's Future Energy Strategy (Nuclear energy, politics, ecology)
Animal Rights: Animal Testing for Cosmetics in Japan (Business, ethics)
The Truth About Marijuana: Furthering Education About Drugs in Japan (Social attitudes, politics, science)
An Investigation into Sex Crimes in India (The caste system, discrimination, slavery)
Cool Japan: Exploiting Japanese Pop Culture (Culture, economics, politics)
Illiteracy in Mali: The Role of The Developed World (International aid, poverty, politics)
A Study of the Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide in Japan (Sociology, culture)
Educating the Japanese: The 1895 Japanese Invasion of Taiwan (History, revisionism, politics)

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- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8366197.stm> (Figure 6)
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/-December 4, 2012> (Figure 7)
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/-December 4, 2014> (Figure 2)
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/-December 10, 2014> (Figures 8 and 9)