The Holocaust through English Movies and Its Role in the Development of Compassion and Conscience

Linda Kanakogi
(Fukuoka College of Health Sciences)


How can educators encourage students to reflect on the vital moral questions raised by the Holocaust, an unprecedented tragedy? The Holocaust occurred long ago and far from Japan and may, therefore, seem to have little connection with Japan or the Japanese people. However, the spirit of humanity and compassion exemplified by Holocaust rescuers, Oskar Schindler and Chiune Sugihara (a Japanese diplomat), who both chose to do the right thing at the risk of their lives shows that there is a very deep connection to all people who care about making the right choices in their own lives. The English films regarding these two men, Schindler’s List and A Japanese Holocaust Rescuer, examines the role of compassion, empathy, and conscience in making moral decisions. By learning about the Holocaust through English films and classroom activities, L2 learners gain understanding and empathy for the Holocaust victims as human beings as well as how moral lessons drawn from it can be applied in their own lives. By touching the students’ emotions, the lessons of the Holocaust can be deeply impressed upon the hearts and minds of the students along with a deeper comprehension of its related English vocabulary.

I. INTRODUCTION

Using various teaching modalities such as films, slides featuring photographs of the Holocaust, visual aids such as the Shoah Foundation Pyramid, Japanese Kanji for Japanese students as well as related classroom activities, an emotional experience with vivid imagery can be created for
students. Such an experience can be more easily internalized and is, therefore, more likely to be learned and remembered by students.

Japanese Kanji is used for Japanese students when the root meaning of the Kanji corresponds with or is related to English words such as “compassion”, “conscience” and “empathy”. Pairing Kanji familiar to L2 learners with new and unfamiliar English vocabulary can make their meaning and concept more accessible to Japanese students.

A slide presentation (29 in total) entitled, “The Holocaust Through English Movies and Its Role in the Development of Compassion and Conscience in an English Context” is shown to students and features Holocaust photographs as well as the history and background of the two Holocaust rescuers, Oskar Schindler and Chiune Sugihara. Before being shown the slide presentation, during a separate lesson, students are given printed copies of the slides to familiarize them with the Holocaust vocabulary and the history behind the photographs. (The slides contain information and photographs drawn mainly from the Internet which I have put together by utilizing Microsoft PowerPoint 2010.)

Another visual aid is the Shoah Foundation Pyramid which outlines the progressive escalation from “Prejudiced Attitudes” (Level I) up through the levels of “Acts of Prejudice”, “Discrimination”, “Violence” and finally ends with “Genocide” (Level V). The use of this visual aid helps students clearly see the root cause and relationship between prejudiced attitudes, acts of prejudice, and violence. Students are also asked to match events from the Holocaust (as well as modern events portraying violence, discrimination, and acts of prejudice) to the corresponding level of the Pyramid to test their English comprehension.

Students are also asked to match news events with the appropriate positive or negative quality it portrays. For example, the headline, “Disaster Relief Supplies Sent to Haitian Earthquake Victims from Japan” is matched by students with the word “compassion” and “Parents Arrested for Child Abuse” is matched with “cruelty” or the phrase “lack of compassion”. Students are thus able to see that the impact of such positive or negative