

# Using a Workshop to Raise Awareness of the Role of English in Promoting Sustainable Development

**I**n English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, teachers face the common challenge of demonstrating the importance of English to students who do not have much contact with users of English in their daily life. This often translates to a lack of progress in English language learning in settings such as Thailand, where in spite of the emphasis put on English teaching by the 1999 National Education Act (Office of the National Education Commission 1999), the policies implemented have led to little progress in students' English proficiency (Franz and Teo 2017). As several researchers note, Thailand's educational system would benefit from incorporating new ways to improve student motivation (Loima and Vibulphol 2014; Vibulphol 2016).

Awareness-raising workshops, in which participants deeply engage with topics related to critical social issues, have successfully demonstrated their capacity to motivate and change the participants' attitudes (Aarts and van Schagen 2006; Sabitha 2008). This article explains the rationale behind using this method—applying the global-citizenship approach to teaching advocated by UNESCO (2015)—to improve students' attitudes toward English learning. The idea is that those who are emotionally moved by the workshop content will feel an increased sense of duty, or intrinsic desire, to learn English. They consequently perceive English as a tool for learning about a topic they are concerned with rather than as a school subject and view English learning as an opportunity rather than as a burden. The underlying assumption of this method is that participants in a workshop

on sustainable development (SD) will realize that English is essential for dealing with SD issues. This article also describes the workshop and gives recommendations to teachers who would like to carry out a similar workshop themselves.

## BACKGROUND

### Raising Awareness with Sustainable Development Content

An indispensable global-citizenship approach sees learners as part of the global community, aware of global priorities such as SD (Paris Education Collective 2015). The approach contrasts with isolationist education and develops core competencies that allow students to make the world a more just, peaceful, tolerant, and sustainable place. English, as the global lingua franca (Graddol

2006), is currently the only realistic medium of international communication and thus an essential tool for global citizens. The field of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship is especially relevant to English teaching due to its potential to influence student motivation through its ethical nature (OXFAM Education 2015). UNESCO (1997, 16) states that “public awareness and understanding” is “the fuel for change,” and that a well-informed populace “will insist that public educational institutions include in their curricula the scientific and other subject matters” required to engage with and achieve SD. This implies that an awareness of the pressing need for SD will increase the desire for tools such as English.

Another advantage of SD content is its potential as a rich source of authentic materials that are known to increase learner motivation (Guariento and Morley 2001), while nevertheless fully retaining its link to real-life topics if those materials are adapted to the learners’ level. The global nature of such content further expands the scope of its meaningfulness. The brain’s emotional center determines what input is worth remembering by gauging its relevance to the learner (Kelly and Sandy 2007). However, what is meaningful to some students may be of little relevance to others who do not share the same “needs, abilities, interests, backgrounds or experience” (UNESCO 2004, 17). This leads to a search for content that students are more universally receptive to. As SD directly relates to the survival of our planet and concerns all living beings, unaware students included, it is an exemplar of content that will engage learners by triggering their emotions, which play a major role in learning (Immordino-Yang and Faeth 2010; Sylwester 1994).

### **WORKSHOP: “TOMORROW NEVER DIES: CREATING A SUSTAINABLE WORLD”**

This workshop—about three hours in length—was designed to show the link between English learning and SD without explicitly mentioning it. It was presented as a

workshop on SD using English as the medium of instruction. The workshop—designed for non-English major university students with beginner to intermediate English skills—was imparted to a group of 20 third-year Thai university students majoring in mathematics education who took part on a voluntary basis. Their area of study suggested that they were not already biased toward either SD or English learning.

The workshop did not focus on the learning of specific language features, but rather on showing the need to use English for successful communication; participants evaluated for themselves the underlying aim of the workshop and its activities. The design introduced here is therefore largely free of guidelines regarding language features themselves and comments on the problems encountered by this particular group of participants. The global-citizenship approach of teaching manifested itself through the use of SD content and teamwork, which was chosen as a main teaching strategy to mirror the need to communicate on a global scale about SD issues. Importantly, the workshop took into account that tool kits and books for workshop facilitators usually advocate such work in small groups (Sims 2006). The definition of SD retained was the one given in the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987, 41): “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The workshop described below consists of the following five activities:

#### **1. Simulation: Need for an International Language (15 minutes)**

This activity raises awareness of the need for an international language in an international setting. The “international setting” is established by attributing made-up languages to the participants and having them try to communicate with these mutually unintelligible languages.

**2. Brainstorming: Unsustainable Problems (30 minutes)**

This activity introduces the concept of sustainability. Participants brainstorm a list of problems and determine whether these problems can improve on their own or are bound to worsen if not addressed.

**3. Internet Search: Availability of Information (20 minutes)**

Participants compare search results related to SD in English and in their first language (L1); in the case of the workshop, this was Thai. The intent is to make apparent the need for English in order to get access to exhaustive information online.

**4. Picture Interpretation: Climate Change (40 minutes)**

Participants reflect on the covert nature of unsustainability by finding the meaning of a set of cartoons related to climate change.

**5. Role Play: International Collaboration (60 minutes)**

Participants assume the roles of imaginary countries and organizations. They then assess the state of their fictional world and plan the changes needed to make it sustainable. This activity makes explicit the collaborative dimension of SD and the need to use English as a medium of communication to sustain development globally.

While the workshop format was preferred for this research project, teachers can easily adapt the same concept to their regular teaching schedule as a series of lessons to suit their classroom contexts. Extending the instruction time would not be problematic, but teachers should avoid shortening the awareness-raising activities, as shorter lessons may not yield similar results. It also seems preferable to

keep a sequencing that places the role play after students have discussed the relevant concepts. The first four parts of the workshop thus serve as a buildup for the final role play, which emphasizes what has been introduced in the previous parts. The following sections describe each activity in detail.

**Activity 1: Simulation: Need for an International Language**

The workshop starts with the participants being told that for the whole activity they would take on the roles of people from different countries who do not speak one another's mother tongue. Each participant is given a different "fictional language" card describing the imaginary language spoken in their respective countries. Those languages are simple but mostly unintelligible modifications of Thai (the participants' L1). The instruction cards are applied to the English sentence, "What important topic did you hear about in the news this week?" Samples of variations of this question in English would include the following:

- "Pronounce all vowels as O" produced, "Wot omportont topoc dod yo hor obot on tho nos thos wok?"
- "Pronounce all consonants as S" produced, "Sas issossass sosis sis sou seas asous is se sews sis sees?"
- "Pronounce only the vowel sounds of your words" produced, "/Λ-I-ɔː-ə-ɑ-I-I-u-i-ə-ʌU-I-ə-u-I-i/."
- "Say only the names of the consonants of your words" produced, "W, H, T, M, P, R, T, N, T, T, P, C, D, D, Y, U, H, R, B, T, N, T, H, N, W, S, T, H, S, W, K."
- "Talk with your tongue stuck to the roof of your mouth" produced incomprehensible sounds.

Other derivations of these examples can be created and used, but there is no need to have as many languages as there are participants, as long as they are encouraged to chat with speakers of other "languages." The instruction

given in our workshop was simply, “Talk to each other using your fictional languages. Start the conversation by asking, ‘What important topic did you hear about in the news this week?’ Then try to continue the conversation. Change partners every minute or so.”

The participants were at first disconcerted to start the workshop in such a way, but after being reassured that they were indeed invited to splutter utterances like, “Shash ishshoshshashsh shoshish shish shou sheash ashoush ish she shewsh shish sheesh?” they quickly made it their mission to do so. Teachers who carry out this activity may notice small groups who stay together, trying diligently to have a conversation. Although they may have fun working out how to understand their friends, they should be reminded to talk to others, too, so they can have an idea of the variety of languages used.

As expected, this exercise did not elicit meaningful conversations, although it did result in quite a few laughs and exchanges that fulfilled the activity’s purpose: to give a taste of trying to communicate without a common language. While the participants had been hesitant to start, they showed no hurry to stop when it was time to move on. This activity served as an icebreaker as well.

In the workshop, apart from the starting sentence, the students chose freely what to talk about; they can, however, be directed to discuss a specific topic that the teacher finds fitting to their context. For example, the teacher can ask students to “talk about last week’s heat wave.” Nevertheless, the main point of this activity is for students to experience the difficulty of communicating in an international setting without a common language, regardless of the exchange’s content.

### **Activity 2: Brainstorming: Unsustainable Problems**

For this activity, the participants are divided into three groups, and each participant is given three pieces of paper. The instruction to participants is, “Write one problem on each paper. The problem can be anything: there’s

a hole in your sock; there was an earthquake in another country; your cat is sick.” After participants finish writing, they are instructed, “Within your group, look together at all the problems you have written, and think how you could sort them into different categories. You could separate them according to how many people are involved, what the problems were caused by, or any other arrangement you come up with.” The groups then present their proposed classifications to the class.

In our case, the suggested categories (e.g., problems related to food, problems related to homework) did not turn out to be useful for illustrating the idea of sustainability, so participants were asked to arrange the problems again, now following this criterion: “Will this problem stay the same or even disappear if we do not act, or will it worsen if it is not resolved?” As a result, all groups came up with assortments of sustainable and unsustainable issues. Although the topics chosen mainly revolved around the participants’ daily lives, it was possible to use the topics to illustrate the ideas of sustainability and unsustainability. For example, one problem/question was, “If you are very tired and keep sleeping too little, will your need for sleep disappear, or will your health worsen?” A short presentation on SD with more varied examples concluded this activity to allow the participants to appreciate the different facets and implications of this matter.

In this activity, the participants can implicitly learn conditional sentences such as, “If people keep buying cars, traffic jams will become unbearable, but if we use more public transportation, commuting will become easier” when discussing the problems.

### **Activity 3: Internet Search: Availability of Information**

In the third activity, participants use their mobile phones to compare information available online on SD—in Thai (in our case) and in English. In the context of the Thai university, most participants had a mobile phone. In other settings, teachers may need to ask students to pair up, provide access

to computers, display the search on a large screen, or prepare a non-digital version of this activity. The following instructions are given: “Get in pairs and search for information about SD topics on the Internet. You can simply search for ‘sustainable development,’ or you can look for specific issues like ‘sustainable development poverty,’ ‘sustainable development clean water,’ or ‘sustainable development education.’”

The teacher should make sure students understand the instructions before continuing: “The important thing is that in each pair, one of you should do the search in English and the other one in Thai (or the appropriate L1). Then you will compare how much information is available in each language, the nature of the information, how detailed it is, and from what type of sources it is available. Also, see if you can guess from the URLs which countries the information in each language was published in.”

After the search, volunteers can report their findings. In our case, the searches revealed an obvious discrepancy. A Google search for “sustainable development” gave 179 more results than a search for its Thai translation (“การพัฒนาอย่างยั่งยืน”) did on google.co.th. The results also differed qualitatively, with the English data often offering a more varied array of information. To demonstrate this, we displayed on a screen the content of the respective Wikipedia pages in both languages, showing one page (in English) filled with extensive data and links beside another page (in Thai) that contained little more than a definition. Although the obvious conclusion was that there was overwhelmingly more information about the topic in English than in Thai, nothing was said in the workshop about the implications, in order to let the participants become aware on their own of the need for English as a tool to learn about SD.

While this activity was useful and appropriate in the context of the workshop in Thailand, it may not be as relevant in places where a satisfying amount of information on SD is available in the local language. In some cases,

teachers may come up with useful variants of this activity, for instance noting that new information is not available as quickly in other languages as it is in English, or that fewer materials on the topic are produced in other languages. In all cases, students should be reminded that even if they have access to the data they need in their own language, they will need English to be able to share their information with people who speak a different language—for example, if they take part in an exchange on social media.

#### **Activity 4: Picture Interpretation: Climate Change**

For this activity, cartoons and captioned pictures are selected from authentic sources in order to substantiate the topic’s tangibility. We chose a focus on climate change in order to make the task concrete. This choice limited the number of topics introduced while staying connected to all aspects of SD, as “climate change and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin” and “the two agendas are mutually reinforcing” (Ki-moon 2015). This focus furthermore removed any possible ambiguity about SD’s international nature and the need for a common language to be able to collaborate on a global scale.

Many pictures are available through an online search or from websites that have a section on images about climate change; however, to serve the purpose of this activity, the images must convey messages that are not obvious at first sight and that require some reflection to be interpreted. It will therefore be helpful for teachers to add words like *funny*, *sarcastic*, or *satire* to their search term. The selected images should also give a general feeling and understanding of how the three dimensions of SD (economy, society, and environment) are linked, with an emphasis on their global and ethical aspects. Teachers can further adjust their selection to a specific language point they want to focus on, for instance preferring cartoons with dialogues if the aim is to practice reported speech. As a side note, teachers will also realize from the search that cartoons with messages trying to discredit the concern for climate change are abundant,

and that careful judgment should be exercised when choosing.

One image was used to demonstrate the type of comments that the participants would later have to come up with. In this image, two people are protecting themselves from rising sea levels by building a wall made out of sandbags. As the water is rising, one of the two tells the other, sitting in a petrol-fueled car, to go get more sandbags from drought-affected regions. The commentary given as a sample interpretation was that different areas of the world are affected differently by climate change and that while some regions are able to momentarily shield themselves from its consequences, others are already suffering from both direct effects and indirect repercussions. The temporary fix used in the cartoon was also doomed to be short-lived, and society should focus on stopping the causes of climate change rather than just treating its symptoms.

Once the type of commentaries expected was clear, groups of five participants were given identical sets of six pictures. The instructions were as follows:

1. “Each student must choose one of the pictures from the set: one participant, one picture. Spend two minutes trying to find its underlying message and how it links society, the economy, and the environment.”
2. “Now discuss your interpretation with the other members of the group. Check to see if they agree or if you should reconsider your understanding of the image.”
3. “After you come to an agreement, work together to prepare short descriptions of the cartoons in English. One participant in each group will present his or her picture to the class, but we don’t know which one yet, so everyone must be ready.” (In the workshop, we threw a die to decide who would speak when it was each group’s turn. This random-selection

technique ensured that every member of the group was ready for the presentation.)

If the levels of English proficiency vary, other group members are welcome to help the group’s representative during his or her speech. Depending on the students’ proficiency, they may have to give basic versions of the more-detailed conclusions they had come to in their L1; developing those presentations in English can be the basis for another class or assignment. To conclude this part, the facilitator can elaborate on less obvious aspects of the images.

#### **Activity 5: Role Play: International Collaboration**

Some students may not be familiar with the following type of activity, so in our workshop, we gave a mock demonstration of the type of role play to come. We used a simple animation on the screen. Four matchstick characters, each named after its color, were shown, along with the information on their respective role cards.

- Blue’s information was, “You owe 1 UM (one Unit of Money) to Red and need to repay it soon. You earn 1 UM a month, but you need it to survive and cannot save any money. Yellow owes you 1 UM.”
- Similarly, the information revealed that both Red and Yellow earned 1 UM a month that they needed to survive. Red owed 1 UM to Yellow and was owed 1 UM by Blue; Yellow owed 1 UM to Blue and was owed 1 UM by Red.
- Green’s role card stated, “You earn 2 UM a month. You need to spend only 1 UM a month. You do not have any debts.”

Consequently, the situation revealed that three characters owed and were owed money but did not know how to solve the problem on their own.

The animation next showed the characters interacting in pairs, telling each other about

their situation. After they had learned new information from the others, the animation showed Blue getting an idea: Blue asked to borrow 1 UM from Green and used this UM to reimburse Red; Red was then in turn able to reimburse Yellow, who was also able to give back the UM owed to Blue. Blue, who then had 2 UM, gave back the UM Green had lent. The participants were told that although their role play would be more advanced, it would follow the same principles. It would start with a problematic situation that individual players would be unable to solve on their own. However, by learning new information from the other players, they would get a better understanding of the whole situation and would be able to work out a solution with the help of others.

In this role-play activity, the class is divided into groups, each doing the same role play independently. Each member of the group receives a role card that describes him or her as either a citizen of a country or a representative of an organization in a fictional world. Stress that the countries and the organizations are not real.

The instructions, which can be broken down into smaller segments to aid students' understanding, are as follows:

“In this role play, you will act as the inhabitants of a fictional world that is not currently sustainable. First, study the information on your role card. Then introduce yourself to each other by sharing the information to find out why your situation is not sustainable.

“After that, discuss what changes you need to make in order to solve your problems. Plan your actions over the next few months or years to make your world sustainable. Consider the following questions [which can be projected on a screen or written on the board]: What will each of you do during the first month? Will you ask someone for help? Will you suggest that someone change his or her actions? Will you reconsider your way of living? How much will you have spent? How much will you have left?

“Then do the same thing for the following months, until the world becomes sustainable. You will have 20 minutes to prepare your plan; after that, you will present it to the rest of the class.”

Five roles are used in this activity, as follows:

- Citizen of a country whose main activity is to extract and sell petrol
- Citizen of a country that provides manpower to the petrol-selling countries
- Citizen of a country where the population is unemployed
- Representative of an environmental organization
- Representative of a political organization

Each role card describes the character's main activity, income, and expenses, along with specific information about the country or organization. Figures 1 through 5 show five sample role cards.

**Role:** You are a citizen of Appleland.

**Task:** To talk to the other members of the group and together find a way to make the world sustainable

**Information about your country:**

- Main activity: Selling the petrol that is extracted for you by the people of Papayaland
- Income: 8 UM (Units of Money) a month
- Expenses: 3 UM a month to live well + 3 UM a month to pay the people of Papayaland
- Current situation: You are happy with your situation and can save 2 UM a month.

**Extra information:**

- The people of Papayaland know how to harvest other types of energy, too.
- One country can manage several plants.

**Figure 1. Role card for a citizen of Appleland**

**Role:** You are a citizen of Papayaland.

**Task:** To talk to the other members of the group and together find a way to make the world sustainable

**Information about your country:**

- Main activity: Extracting petrol for Appleland
- Income: 3 UM (Units of Money) a month paid by Appleland
- Expenses: 2 UM a month to live well
- Current situation: You are happy with your situation and can save 1 UM a month.

**Extra information:**

- The salary for working in renewable-energy plants is the same as for working for fossil-fuels extraction.
- Your country receives a lot of sunlight exposure.

**Figure 2. Role card for a citizen of Papayaland**

**Role:** You are a representative of an international environmental organization, the World Protection Alliance. Your role is to make sure that all countries are acting in a way that makes the world sustainable.

**Task:** To talk to the other members of the group and share the information you have and to look with them for a way to make the world sustainable

**Information:**

- Petrol extraction pollutes a lot. If pollution doesn't go down, some people will be sick and won't be able to work anymore.
- There is only enough petrol left in the world for one more year; after that, all jobs will be lost.
- Solar power plants can operate in countries that receive enough sunlight exposure.

**Figure 4. Role card for a representative of the World Protection Alliance**

**Role:** You are a citizen of Pineappleland.

**Task:** To talk to the other members of the group and together find a way to make the world sustainable

**Information about your country:**

- Main activity: People in your country are currently unemployed.
- Income: None
- Expenses: 2 UM (Units of Money) a month to live well
- Current situation: You need to find money or jobs to survive.

**Extra information:**

- All countries can lend or borrow money from each other.
- You know how to work on any type of power plant.
- Your country receives a lot of sunlight exposure.

**Figure 3. Role card for a citizen of Pineappleland**

**Role:** You are a representative of an international political organization, the World Countries Organization. Your role is to make sure that all countries are acting in a way that makes the world sustainable.

**Task:** To talk to the other members of the group and share the information you have and to look with them for a way to make the world sustainable

**Information:**

- Solar power plants can be created by following this plan:
  - Investment = 10 UM (Units of Money)
  - Monthly income = 10 UM
  - Manpower needed = 1 country per plant
- One country can manage several plants.
- All countries can lend or borrow money from each other.

**Figure 5. Role card for a representative of the World Countries Organization**



The participants do the role play as if the fictional language assigned in the first activity were their mother tongue. Playing characters from different language backgrounds, they have the choice to communicate either in their country's fictional, unintelligible language or in English. In our workshop, all the participants of course chose English, especially since all they really had to do in the first phase of the role play was to report the information on their card, which was in English. A standard exchange might go like this:

A: Hello, I am from Appleland. People in my country sell the petrol that is extracted in Papayaland. We earn 8 UM a month and can save 2UM after we have used 3 UM a month to live and 3UM to pay the people of Papayaland, who extract the petrol. They know how to harvest all other types of energy, too. One country can manage several plants.

B: Hi, I am from the World Protection Alliance, an international environmental organization. I know that there is only enough petrol left in the world for one more year; after that, all jobs will be lost. Petrol extraction also pollutes. If pollution doesn't go down, some people will become sick and won't be able to work anymore. Solar power plants can operate in any country that receives enough sunlight exposure.

Through these exchanges, the participants learn that their world is not sustainable for the following reasons:

- Unemployed players do not have the means to survive.
- There are only enough nonrenewable fuels left for one year. After that, all jobs will be terminated and countries will survive only as long as their savings allow it.
- The current system is harmful to the environment and to people's health.

The participants also share bits of information that they can put together and use to prevent

these problems from happening. Then, in the second phase, all members in each group sit together and consider what changes need to be made for their world to become sustainable. The players can come up with different solutions; however, in our workshop, all solutions revolved around these main ideas:

- The countries providing labor would lend money to the unemployed country so that the latter could survive until there were new jobs.
- The country that sold petrol would save money to invest into a change from nonrenewable energy to renewable energy.
- After these countries had enough savings to invest, they would create enough solar power plants to give jobs to both their former employees and the unemployed country.
- The unemployed country would then start to reimburse the money it had borrowed.
- Some countries' monthly profit would go down, but survival wouldn't be limited to one year anymore, and they would be able to provide jobs for all countries.

After the deliberation session, each group demonstrates its solution to the class. In our case, two groups shared a working solution, while the third could not complete the task because of time limitations. The two successful groups had first agreed on the overall method for making the world sustainable before arranging the details of what would happen each month, while the third group had instead proposed changes month by month without a clear vision of who would achieve what in the end. When members of the third group listened to the other groups' solutions, they commented that they had been trying to do something similar but had become stuck in the logistical details.

As for language-skill enhancement, although it was announced that communication should be in English, there was no strict measure to

ban the use of Thai. While all students kept to English when playing in pairs, during the group discussion they had to make sure they were understood not just by one partner, but by four. This dynamic made the use of English cumbersome for some, who switched back to Thai. If teachers believe that their students' level is high enough and would like this part to be done exclusively in English, they should state it explicitly. Otherwise, some students are likely to use their L1 in order to be more efficient.

Teachers can simplify this activity by keeping only the roles of the “labor” and “plant-owner” countries, then giving students directly the information known by the organizations. Or teachers can make the activity more challenging by adding new roles and parameters. Complex and more-realistic roles should, however, be introduced only with students who are known to be resourceful or already familiar with this type of activity, as those without experience may need to get used to role-playing before they can participate efficiently.

Although the choice of “country,” rather than “individual” or “region,” as the role unit results in an oversimplification that does not parallel real life, it strengthens the feeling of solving a global issue, and it rationalizes the use of English as a medium of communication. Teachers who wish to address the complexity of real-life dynamics between countries can do it as a class discussion to ensure that their students are not misled by assumptions from the simplifications that were needed to make the role play doable. They can also assign their students to look for answers to questions raised during a group reflection on the activity, or they can dedicate a new part of the workshop to this issue.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Since this workshop was designed as an intervention in a research project, 15 out of 20 participants were interviewed to explore the effects of the workshop on their attitudes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in

Thai, and the transcripts were analyzed using content analysis.

The data show that the workshop helped the participants realize the importance of SD issues, their role as global citizens in enhancing the sustainability of society, and the role of English as a tool to help achieve SD. All interviewees addressed the ethical dimension of life in society, and all but one were careful to indicate that they understood how SD was a global issue rather than a national one. Twelve of the interviewees followed the straightforward reasoning that because SD is a global issue, communication is needed between people from different language backgrounds, and English is the de facto best choice for a common language. Only two participants did not mention “English” or “a common language” as a tool needed to achieve SD.

This project shows that a three-hour workshop actively involving the participants was enough to have them predominantly come to the conclusion on their own that English is a necessary tool to achieve SD. Being able in this way to render English more meaningful to a population that often feels little connection to this language is in itself an asset likely to increase the quality of learning (Ausubel 1960, 1963). However, beyond exploring the impact of the topic's meaningfulness, the aim of the study was to probe whether ethics and the desire to help the world could be used to enhance attitudes. That these notions came up overwhelmingly in the participants' responses suggests that the role of English as a useful tool was not merely understood as neutral information they could relate to, but as a matter that had the potential to move them emotionally.

Krashen (2011, IC1) makes a case for *Compelling Comprehensible Input*—content that is not only meaningful, but compelling, arguing that “it may be the only way we truly acquire language.” Krashen and Bland (2014) also report on a study by Fink (1995/1996) that describes the remarkable literacy achieved by 12 dyslexic children

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whose learning improved dramatically when they were presented with content that was not merely useful to them, but that they were passionate about. While compelling content feeds off the learners' passions, the current study proposes that similar benefits could be reached by triggering the learners' ethical sensibility and emotions, which would increase their involvement and motivation (Méndez López and Peña Aguilar 2013). While *affect* has been studied under the form of motivation, attitude, student preferences, and other incarnations, research on the role of emotions in second-language acquisition has mainly focused on interactions between students, their environment, and their teacher (Bown and White 2010a, 2010b), with a lack of emphasis on a potentially promising “affect content” (Ma 2012).

Another reason that content on ethical issues may prove beneficial to English learning can be introduced through the reflections of Bradley (2010), who cites a study on teacher motivation in Pennington and Riley (1991), in which “moral values” and “social service” are rated the highest of 20 proposed aspects resulting in satisfaction toward their work. This shows that the intrinsic desire to help is the main motivating factor for teachers, and it is quite conceivable that they may successfully pass on their enthusiasm for a topic that they find ethically important to their learners, who would thus adopt this emotionally charged topic as their own intrinsic motivation.

### CONCLUSION

This little-explored but promising approach entails additional efforts to illustrate how carefully chosen content can trigger students' emotions in order to make them more

receptive to language learning, and teachers are therefore encouraged to conduct action research with their own classes to help further substantiate these findings. As many schools, or even countries, have not yet integrated essential matters like SD into their education systems, rigorously establishing a causation link between attitudes toward English learning and awareness of SD issues would prove useful to the fields of both teaching English and SD.

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**Guillaume Langlois** teaches English at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok. He is a vegan and a freethinker. When not busy hurting himself skateboarding, he is doing aikido, dabbling in foreign languages, or daydreaming about metaphysics.

**Jutarat Vibulphol** is an English teacher educator at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. Her research interests are in the areas of learners' beliefs, motivation, and autonomy; ELT pedagogy; and teacher preparation and professional development.