RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS AS PART OF EFL TEACHING IN JAPAN

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BY

Andrew Neal Reimann
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STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any degree to any other university or institution. The sources of information used and the extent to which the work of others has been utilized have been indicated in this thesis in the manner conventionally approved in the research field in which the thesis fits. The approval from Ethics Committee has been obtained

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ABSTRACT

The complex, cause and effect relationship between language and culture has been an important area of inquiry in Applied and Socio Linguistics, ever since it was originally proposed within the theory of Linguistic Relativity (1929) and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1940). These theories stated that the basic components of any language are indivisible from the perspectives of the users and therefore affect the way a certain language group views the world. Present research investigating this relationship is more concerned with how cultural differences influence the language learning process. Considering recent trends focusing on English as a Global Language and the diversity of learners and contexts, attention has shifted to developing cultural awareness and competence as an essential component of second language acquisition. With the steady increase of international travel, global economy, communication technology and the prospect that most people will have frequent and sustained contact and experience with other cultures in the future, it is no longer adequate that language learners merely have a command or a level of competence in a language. What is required, for full participation in an increasingly integrated world, is a deeper understanding and a comprehensive arsenal of meta-skills which will assist learners with acquisition and navigation of the finer nuances and sub levels of communication and interaction. Apart from language, what other skills do learners require? What are common problems that all people have when engaging with a new culture or in a new environment? How can these be taught or
acquired out of context? What is the role of the teacher in facilitating cultural awareness?

In seeking answers to these questions, this dissertation will critically review relevant research, analyze various contexts and methodologies and attempt to determine what type of approach is best suited to the needs and environments of today's EFL learners in Japan. In conclusion, some ideas will be proposed which may provide insight into the nature, and feasibility of a cross culturally appropriate pedagogy.
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FOREWORD

RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS

That language is inseparably intertwined with culture is by no means a new concept, originally proposed within the theory of Linguistic Relativity (1929) and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1940), stating that the basic components of any language are indivisible from the perspectives of the users and therefore affect the way a certain language group views the world. Present research investigating this relationship aims to understand and explain differences in language learning and how contexts, cultures and methodologies affect each other and influence the overall learning process. In light of recent trends focusing on English as a Global Language and the diversity of learners and contexts, attention has shifted to developing cultural awareness and competence as an essential component of second language acquisition. With the steady increase of international travel, global economy, communication technology and the prospect that most people will have frequent and sustained contact and experience with other cultures in the future, it is no longer adequate that language learners merely have a command or a level of competence in a language. What is required, for full participation in an increasingly integrated world, is a deeper understanding and a comprehensive arsenal of
meta-skills which will assist learners with acquisition and navigation of the finer nuances and sub levels of communication and interaction. Apart from language, what other skills do learners require? What are common problems that all people have when engaging with a new culture or in a new environment? How can these be taught or acquired out of context? What is the role of the teacher in facilitating cultural awareness? In seeking answers to these questions, this study will critically review relevant research, analyze various contexts and methodologies and attempt to determine what type of approach is best suited to the needs and environments of today’s EFL learners. In conclusion, some ideas will be proposed which may provide insight into the nature, and feasibility of a cross culturally appropriate pedagogy.

Recent literature (Kramsch, 1993, Byram, 1997, Canagarajah, 2002) on curriculum innovation and second language acquisition in general has determined an almost unanimous need for more globalised and context sensitive teaching methodologies, however, has been fairly inconclusive on how best to meet these needs. The following considers this previous research and endeavors to seek out a practical means of raising cultural awareness as part of regular EFL instruction.