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*“Eco-Bias in English Language Textbooks: Global Education or Indoctrination?”*

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Recently there has been a growing awareness of the “sociopolitical” aspects of English language teaching (Santos, 1992; Eggington, 1993; Heiman, 1994). It appears that teaching language inevitably also means teaching cultural values, whether explicitly or implicitly. The latest trend towards “global education” assumes an explicit teaching of values conducive to global citizenship: eco-friendly perspectives on issues ranging from development and consumerism to tourism and food form the basis of several listening, speaking and reading ESL textbooks marketed in Japan these days. While supporting the global education agenda in English language teaching, we would like to examine the inherent pressures and problems that come along with this type of “values education”.

These problems range from concerns of teachers who feel uncomfortable with “shoving culture down students’ throats when they need to pass the TOEFL” (Jones, 1993), to the discomfort of students who feel pressure to agree with the eco-bias present in the textbook and/or the teacher’s views. Japanese students fresh out of highschool often have neither the critical thinking skills to cope with this discomfort, nor the language to express their disagreement, and the potential result is a kind of indoctrination of global perspectives.

Eggington (1993) points out the dangers of what he calls a “nutritionalist” approach to language-through-content teaching where “we as the all-knowing and all-powerful masters of the classroom feed bits of our “correct’ sociopolitical culture and our “superior” language to our undernourished students”. Even in global education, teachers’ egos can get in the way and the classroom can become a platform for a certain agenda which students are afraid to question. However, the solution is not a decontextualized grammar lesson, but rather, careful attention to developing a learner-centered classroom which remains sensitive to students’ language needs, their cultural assumptions, their level of global awareness, and

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their rights and responsibilities as maturing young adults to question freely, disagree openly and have fair educational choices.

Using student questionnaires and journal entries, the presenters will attempt to measure beginning (freshmen) students' "global awareness" and attitudes to global education content in language learning. Then students' responses to sample activities/units from selected global issues ESL texts - by both American and Japanese publishers - will be evaluated and suggestions made for tailoring activities to make them more student-centered and less indoctrinative. Finally, the use of the journal as a tool for critical thinking and a basis for lively, informed discussion on values-related, global issues will be presented as one solution to the dilemma of cultural bias in language teaching.

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