May Ouma (Meisei University, Japan)

Enabling Cross-border Understanding and Cultural Competence in the EFL Classroom

The present talk describes an elective syllabus focused on aiding students in gaining cultural awareness, developed by the presenter. In this syllabus, students explore notions of culture, identity, and discourse. Using social media, movies and TV shows, personal experience, and independent research, students discuss ideas such as *discrimination*, *stereotypes*, *beauty standards* and *morality* using media, their past experiences, and reflection of their own cultures. The course aims to empower students with knowledge and skills to appreciate meaningful intercultural encounters. Over the last three years of conducting this course, students' cultural perceptions have shifted and their thinking has been broadened as they explored unexplored areas of their own and foreign cultures.

Data was collected in an English language classroom in Japan through fieldnotes, participant observation, and short independent research by participants. As an elective one, the course was open to 2nd and 4th-year students and included several international as well as local Japanese students. Independent research data was weekly diaries of participants' intercultural experiences. They explored how these encounters affected their beliefs, altered their preconceptions, or provided new knowledge. These experiences were used in classroom discussions, and students were able to reflect on their experiences as well as their peers and provide advice and new perspectives. Students' views, perceptions and open-mindedness were compared throughout the course, and interviews were conducted at the end of the course to form qualitative narrative data.

Key words: Cultural competence, cross border, task-based learning, multiculturalism, EFL

Biodata

May Ouma, MA in English and American Literature and Communications, is a university lecturer based in Japan. With a background in literary studies, communication and English language teaching, her research interests are diverse. She has professional experience teaching EFL, spanning from children, lower and higher education, all the way to teaching business English at corporations such as Toshiba. Currently her research focuses on cultural competency, intercultural relations, and literature as a tool for communication and language acquisition.

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