English Education in Singapore and Malaysia: An insider’s view, an outsider’s view

Jan Stewart

The introduction includes an historical overview of Singapore and Malaysia as pertaining to education. Ai-girl Tan (the insider) did studies on children’s perceptions of learning activities, characteristics of a good teacher, the English language classroom (primary level), choral learning, and learning in general. These are evaluated, noting Tan’s emphasis on creativity and multiplicity. M. Bakri Musa (the outsider) is a doctor residing in California. A product of the Malaysian system, he feels free to criticize it from a distance. His comments on other countries’ educational systems (Canada, Germany, Brazil, Chile, plus the International Baccalaureate), while pertinent, sometimes lack details. However, his level-headed approach is exactly the opposite of Tan’s dogma of creativity. Nevertheless Tan, the insider, is more likely to affect change in Singapore than Bakri Musa, the outsider, is to affect change in Malaysia, for his opinions, when voiced, exist only as the voice of opposition in a nation where a strong conservative government still pulls the strings. (15 ページ)

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筑紫女学園大学・短期大学人間文化研究所「年報」第21号平成21年9月
Children’s Perceptions of English Education in Singapore

Jan Stewart

The presenter first summarized previous speeches from 2004-2005, touching on points such as socio-cultural aspects of language planning in Singapore, key concepts of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory, and critical and creative thinking skills. He then gave an overview of the theoretical background of education in Singapore: child psychology (à la Engel, 1913-1999), needs (à la Maslow), co-constructing learning spaces, embracing multiplicity (Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner); and action research (i.e., field work) for the purpose of answering both quantitative and qualitative research questions. Next he discussed four out of five of A.G. Tan’s studies (from her book Exploring Children’s Perceptions of Learning, 2004): children’s perceptions of learning activities, characteristics of a good teacher, the English language classroom (primary level), and learning in general. He discussed three learning strategies: integrated brainstorming, the 3-2-1 approach, and challenge corner. Finally, the presenter gave his own perceptions of education in Singapore: the Singaporean bandwagon, the problem of universal creativity, feminist issues, and relevance of all of these to English education in Japan. (25 ページ; 120 分)

This paper was presented at the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) Kyushu-Okinawa Branch Conference on English Education in East Asia, held at Seinan University (March 15, 2008).

JACET 九州・沖縄支部東アジア英語教育研究会・
西南学院大学平成 20 年 3 月 15 日
Malaysia’s Ailing English Education System: In search of a miracle cure

Jan Stewart

In his book *An Education System Worthy of Malaysia* (2003), M. Bakri Musa details Malaysia’s education system in terms of Malay nationalism, segregation, religious schools, universities and the matriculation system, and the centralized role of government. He then examines education in America, Canada, Germany, Brazil and Chile in search of solutions applicable to Malaysia. He makes suggestions in terms of following different models, introducing four core subjects, ensuring that the student body reflects the larger society proportionately, actively discouraging segregation, revising the school-leaving examination system, allowing parental choice, revamping the matriculation system as well as the entire Islamic stream, patterning high schools after the American schools (if they are academic) or after German schools (if they are vocational), broadening the undergraduate university curriculum, encouraging private sector participation, restructuring the teachers’ colleges, offering incentives to attract talented teachers, and reducing the involvement of government in all aspects of education.

Although Bakri Musa’s evaluation of the Malaysian system is well-founded, his experience with the American system is sketchy, leaving wide gaps in his theory. This notwithstanding, he makes many suggestions which, if followed, would genuinely improve the educational system of Malaysia. (21 ページ; 120 分)

This paper was presented at the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) Kyushu-Okinawa Branch Conference on English Education in East Asia, held at Seinan University (March 14, 2009).

JACET 九州・沖縄支部東アジア英語教育研究会・
西南学院大学 平成 21 年 3 月 14 日