

ELT and the Risk of Political Brainwashing: A Novel Approach to Deconstructing Politically-Constructed Identities

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Abstract

Much headway recently has been made in terms of devising pedagogical tactics to lay bare the 'powerful unsaids' of the 'topdog', preserve the learner's Arab identity and meet the dangerous effects of a foreign culture. Among the strategies of resistance most frequently employed by Arab intellectuals, scholars and educationists, we find the censorial approach. The belief behind this is that any exposure of Arab students to western culture and values is likely to lead them to culture-shock, to political brainwashing, and even to a rejection of their own culture and identity. My belief, however, is that the real solution to cultural brainwashing and the Arab identity crisis is not censorship of cultural texts. A more fruitful defence against cultural indoctrination would be to draw Arab students' attention to how language works through unstated assumptions and to sensitize them to the working of ideology. This paper advances the claim that, because students are in any case in contact with western values, and not necessarily through textbooks, Arab scholars should help students develop a sense of "healthy criticism" and equip them with a "critical language awareness" and effective discourse patterns. For the implementation of this strategy, linguistic tools from the "Prague school of Linguistics" are considered, mainly "Theme, 'Rheme', and 'Foregrounding'". Illustrative passages from President Dwight Eisenhower's "The Chance for Peace Speech" will be scrutinized.

Key Words: EFL learners, cultural brainwashing, thematic approach, censorial approach, healthy criticism