Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA): Procedures for Nurturing Affective Learning

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The Asian Conference on Language Learning 2019
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract
This paper aims to provide detailed and replicable protocols for the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) to language teaching, developed by the author. FEMA involves the conscious application of an emotional field by self-re-generating educational actors. This is done to promote key concepts that indirectly affect educational outcomes by reducing stress and increasing motivation. The approach supports the creation of a stress-free classroom environment and promotes a trusting family-like atmosphere. FEMA teachers aim to react in a non-judgmental manner to language errors, even embracing failure and mistakes. Having pioneered this approach, the author sets out to develop an even more a robust relationship-centered theory of language learning. The current paper develops these ideas based on concerns that arose during experimental research. Features of classroom plant, tools and equipment, communication of key concepts, relational and transactional factors are considered in detail. In particular, the study reveals teachers' continuous self-cultivation as being of great importance.

Keywords: Family Environment Mode Approach, Motivation, Learning Beliefs, Affect

Introduction

Teaching and learning any subject is an intricate process that involves many different interactions. The relationship between learners, interclass groups, teachers and the general social environment are also influenced by numerous other factors such as the time of day, weather, or even the class that took place beforehand. Everything learners bring to the classroom, including beliefs, personalities, sense of self, and relationships with the people around them, will influence their actions in class. Similarly, what teachers carry with them in these terms will impact on the way they behave and interact. In order to support learners and empower them to succeed in their language-learning endeavors, teachers need to understand how these multiple interacting factors affect learning (William et al., 2015). Within this complex range of dynamics, the importance of affective aspects such as stress and motivation has been widely recognized (Dörnyei, 1990, Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre & Clement, 1996, 1997).

Affect is an umbrella term that covers all the emotionally related aspects of language learning such as, emotions, feelings, and moods (William et al., 2015), and deals with the emotional rather than the intellectual side of language. Its study covers a wide range of aspects, including motivation, anxiety, competitiveness, cooperative learning, and self-esteem. William (2015) and Gross (2017) also emphasized that emotions mediate our learning, our use of language, and our behaviors and attitudes towards the language, the class, the materials, and even ourselves. For more than half a century, this area has long been considered one of the three main domains of learning (Krathwoh, 1964; Harrow, 1972). Much of the authors' work to date has focused on motivation and strategies for its enhancement. Motivation here refers to the combination of effort and desire to achieve the goal plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language. It can be considered as a driving force; a psychological one that reinforces an action toward a desired goal in the way thirst motivates an individual to drink.

In the classroom, motivation and affect in general are extremely important variables that can make the difference between failure and success. Inner conditions such as wishes, desires and goals, activate one to move in a particular behavioral direction. For example, when they receive praise or complements, students' excitement and enthusiasm to continue working on tasks increases. This provides motivation for them to study even harder. Motivation can be divided into two types: Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation that is driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself, and exists within the individual rather than relying on external pressures or a desire for reward. In contrast, extrinsic motivation comes from outside of the individual. Commonly, it encourages competition and takes the form of rewards such as prizes, money or grades.

While motivation is vital, anxiety, a general feeling of tension, apprehension and arousal of the nervous system also impact strongly on the learning process (Horwitz, 1986, MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C., 1991, 1994). With regard to language learning, a dual view of anxiety as being either transferred from other pre-existing concerns or as situation specific has been suggested (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Horwitz, 1986). In the author's own work to date, students fear of speaking in front of their peers, being laughed at, made fools of or using pronunciation unlike that of

native speakers have appeared as prominent sources of language learning anxiety. The idea that anxious teachers may be themselves an unwitting cause of flow-on stress is also an interesting concern that warrants further attention. In the author's view, the affective dimension and questions of stress and motivation in learning mentioned above are of great importance. These underlie the development of her Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA), documented in recent experimental and exploratory research papers that mainly reported students' perceptions (Ocampo, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b). This general approach is summarized in the following section.

Procedures and General Outline of FEMA

The Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) to language teaching aims to reduce stress and increase motivation in language learning by calibrating attitudinal adjustments. The word family is intended to invoke a high degree of intimacy between participants. The role of the teacher (the author as Ma'am Mom in studies to date) in generating and sustaining the classroom atmosphere is vital. The key attitudinal changes (referred to as mindsets in the author's work) emphasized were embracing failure and letting go of fear of making mistakes and thinking of the class and its subgroups as family-like units. These ideas are illustrated in the figure 1 below (reproduced from the author's 2015 paper).

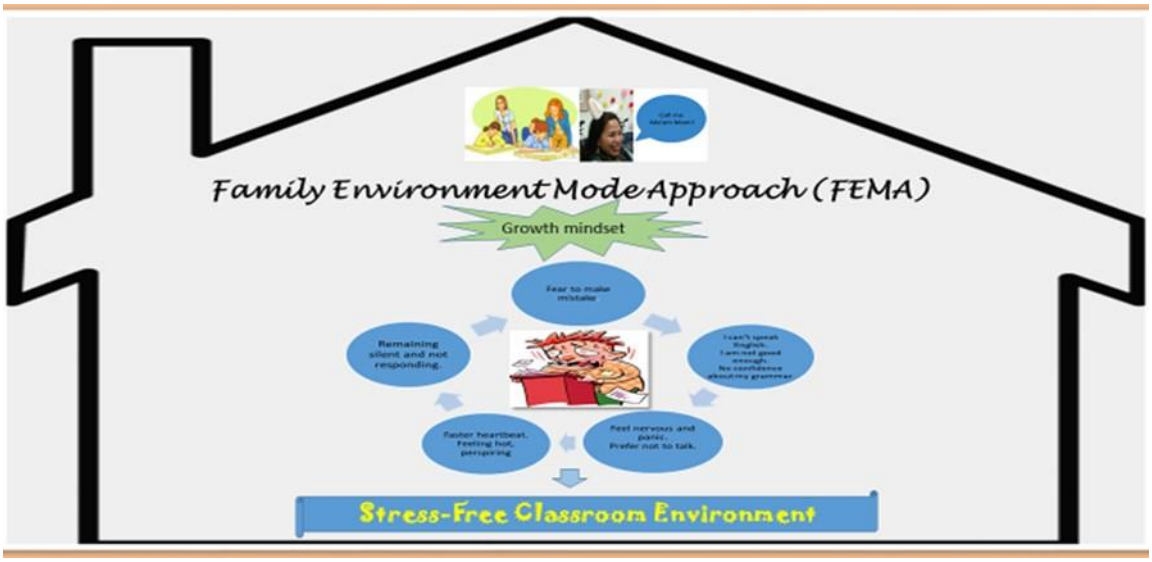

Figure 1: Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) Model

Stress-free Environment in FEMA

Acceptance of these key attitudes and responses to the FEMA-style teaching in general were assessed from the standpoint of students' perceptions using questionnaires and a novel electronic mediating artifact '*Necomimi*' or cat's ears, which generally measured students' stress reactions in response to questions in English. *Necomimi* were very effective in helping to promote the fun, stress-free atmosphere that the author considers ideal in FEMA. Exploratory research (Ocampo, 2015, 2016), revealed that Japanese students enjoy question-and-answer conversation activities using *Necomimi*, presented as a 'wearable brainwaves of emotion detector'. The face-to-face seating arrangement used during the experiment meant that students'

emotions were visible to everyone and this encouraged their classmates to ask more questions. This positive environment allows students to naturally increase the endorphin, dopamine or serotonin levels in their brains, making the educational experience more pleasurable and intrinsically rewarding (Figure 2).

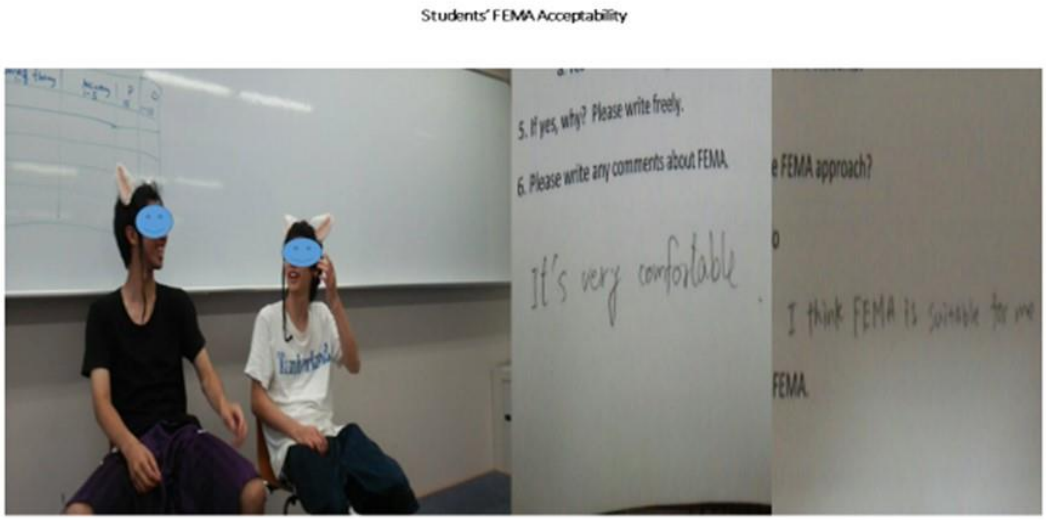

Figure 2: FEMA acceptability while wearing *Necomimi* in a conversation activity

Despite the general positive reception of FEMA, feedback from some colleagues questioning whether FEMA amounted to no more than referring to the teacher as 'Ma'am Mom' and encouraging classroom bonding, prompted the researcher to probe her conception of FEMA-style teaching more deeply and establish more detailed and replicable protocols for the method. A teacher who carefully cultivates herself intellectually and emotionally and develops deep and caring relationships with her students may interact with them in real-time in any number of potentially effective ways. This observation makes the job of delimiting specific FEMA techniques very difficult. However, the current study will attempt to do so, based on the author's experiences and concerns that arose during experimental research.

Towards a Detailed Protocol for FEMA

The adoption of social science research methods has come relatively late to academia in East Asia where the researcher is active. Hence human experiences of tremendous complexity, such as foreign language education, are sometimes examined from an Aristotelian perspective (Morrell, 2012) perhaps more appropriate to the hard sciences; the resulting graphs and measures presented with apparent grave seriousness in a self-conscious display of purported rigor. Although the author's previous work has tended in this direction, in working towards unpacking FEMA a direction towards a more Heideggerian perspective will be charted (Heidegger, 1971). At the same time, FEMA's overriding imperative of calibrating attitudinal change towards increased motivation and decreased stress will be born in mind. FEMA factors that influence this change and arose in previous work will be examined beginning with more corporeal and readily observable factors such as physical classroom plant and related tools and equipment. Next, key concepts and ideas and the way they are

communicated and emphasized is dealt with. After that, relational and transactional factors between FEMA participants are discussed. Finally, Teachers' self-cultivation, perhaps the most important, but paradoxically more problematic area from the point of view of academic research, will be discussed.

Physical Classroom Plant and Related Tools and Equipment

A FEMA classroom plant is colorful, permits variation, reflects the participants' identities and provides spaces for active and creative tasks. Rather than one ideal physical classroom plant, the ability to vary the arrangement according to the activity appeared as important in previous work. In practical terms, this is often not possible in classrooms where the furniture is fixed in position, leaving little room for adjustment. An example of this appeared in the author's recent study of a CALL environment in which visual access was "restricted to a direct front-on or rear view of fixed blocks of computer desks that limits interaction between teacher and students" hindering the creation of a "safe and productive ESL learning environment" (Ocampo, 2017). Where possible, FEMA-friendly desk arrangement parameters are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) desk arrangement

Activity/Purpose	**Student/Desk arrangement**
Demonstration	Desks in single or double rows
Conversation	U-shaped desk arrangement Students facing each other or side by side
General	Any arrangement that accommodates an inclusive learning environment. Placing easily distracted students away from each other, doorways, windows, and areas of high traffic.

Practical and aesthetic dimensions of the visual and acoustic classroom environment are also important. For example, student work such as hand-made posters help to develop students' sense of belonging. Music influences mood in calming, comforting or stimulating ways and can even be used as a reward. Plants and animals can influence learning in the classroom but just like restrictions on desk placement variability, administrative constraints may not permit their incorporation in the classroom experience. Of the potential tools that would help a FEMA classroom flourish, *Necomimi* described earlier, is a characteristic example. This animatronic cat-ear headset is approachable, user friendly and fun promoting. Tools with these properties including videos and visual aids are very useful in FEMA. Ubiquitous technology, such as personally owned cell phones and computers have a place, with permission from the teacher. It is also conceivable that complex digital tools and gadgets might also be used, but their time-absorbing and exacting use is likely to tend away from the reduction of stress within the standard time limits of a language lesson. Uneven degrees of technological familiarity, particularly intergenerational, means that without prudent preparation the required use of computer-related gadgets as found in CALL environments can increase stress. For these reasons, they are not recommended as part of FEMA protocol, at least in the author's conception.

A FEMA approach does not view the classroom plant in isolation, but considers the relationship with and impact on the emotional environment as shown in Figure 3 below:

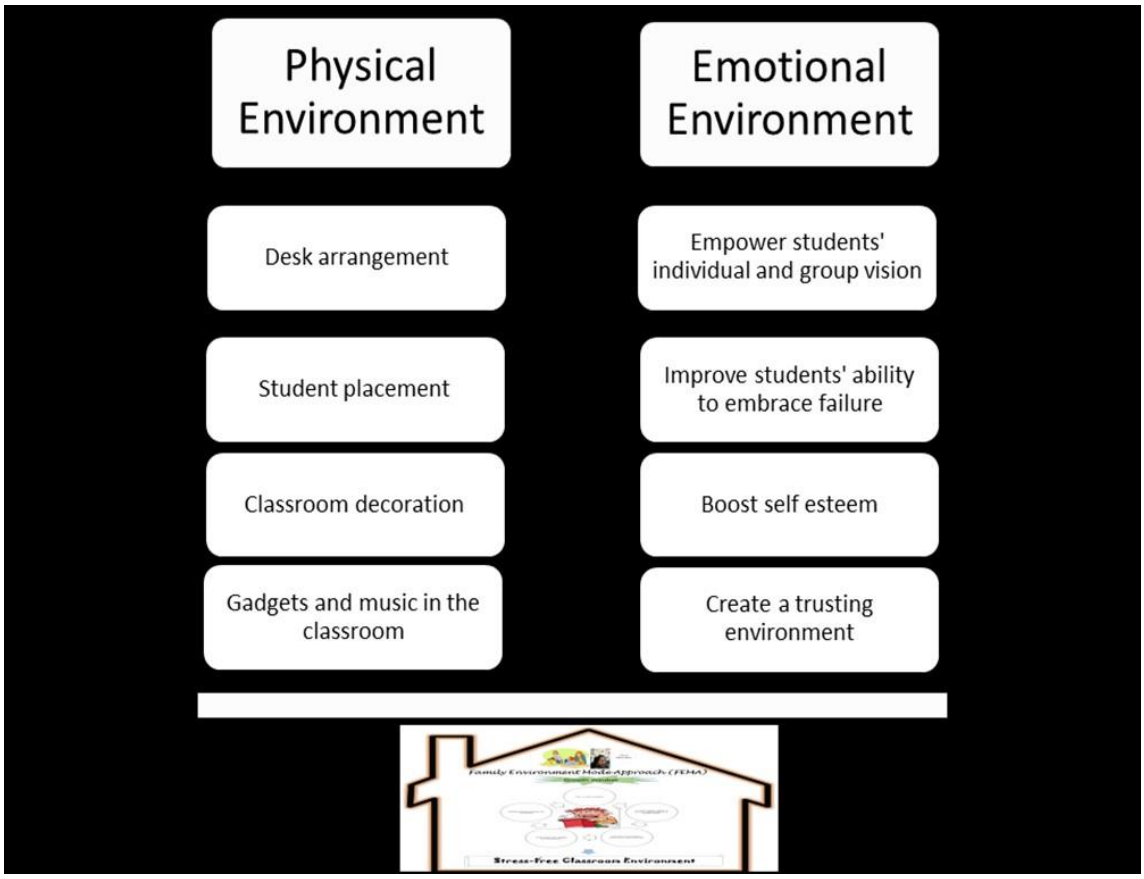

Figure 3: Balanced relationship of physical plant and emotional environment in FEMA

As shown in Figure 3, it is possible to think of an 'emotional' classroom environment, an idea drawn metaphorically from that of the physical plant but perhaps related more to the transactional and teacher self-cultivation elements that are examined later. Environments with good emotions affect memory and brain development and in the case of children, the effects of environment on brain development should not be underestimated. When a person feels satisfied, the brain releases endorphins that increase memory skill. The judicious modulation of music, physical movement, sense of safety etc. also has the potential to increase memory (Jensen, 2008; Rockell & Ocampo, 2017).

Communication and Emphasis of Key Concepts

As already mentioned, FEMA aims to increase motivation and reduce stress. Depending on the students' cultural background, the most appropriate key concepts that support such a result may vary. In Japan, where the author first developed FEMA, an over-emphasis on accuracy and perfectionistic attitude on the part of English language students pervades. For this reason, the first key concept "embracing failure and letting go of fear of making mistakes" was stressed. In this way, the belief that through mistakes one prospers helped many of the author's students in Japan gain

considerable confidence to speak. It may be the case that when working in cultures other than Japan, different concepts will be more effective and relevant and this can be investigated in future research. The second key concept "think of the class and its subgroups as family-like units" is considered universal and of basic importance to FEMA by the author. A FEMA instructor should emphasize both these concepts iteratively. The ideas should be explained directly and in detail during the initial class orientation and again repeatedly prior to relevant class activity.

In addition to giving overt directives, the author also recommends covert demonstrations such as the teacher allowing herself to make her own mistakes in front of the class, expressing a kind of vulnerable solidarity. In the Japanese context, however, the author cautions that these occasions should be sparing as they may reduce the students' trust in the teacher's ability to teach. In general, a FEMA style of delivery is one that engages attention following an emotional trigger or hook, one of the important keys of brain-based education. Here, music, arts and classroom games assist by 'knocking' into the emotional areas to help the brain to remember and connect information. Humor, such as starting a lesson by telling a funny story or showing an amusing picture to help students feel comfortable is also very effective. Carefully chosen tools such as the *Necomimi* described earlier can also promote a relaxed mood and support engaging ways to communicate key concepts.

Relational and Transactional Factors in the Classroom

In FEMA, the teacher, who is responsible for arranging the classroom plant and modulating the mood and emotional environment in a way that promotes the communication of key concepts, holds both great responsibility and authority. But this formal authority is softened by having students address her using a familial kinship term such as mom, dad, sister or brother (Ma'am Mom in the case of the author). Students are also encouraged to consider their classmates as siblings and all classroom activity is performed in either small groups or pairs, never alone (with the exception of the final exam). This cooperative effort tends toward being task-oriented, rather than ego-oriented, and students are rewarded for effort and improvement, rather than for static variables such as 'ability'. FEMA encourages practices that improve students' self-esteem, such as using affirmative language, providing positive statements and drawing on classroom peers as internal models of behavior.

Self-efficacy is an important determiner of positive motivation. Students feel more in control when they learn to attribute their classroom successes or failures to their own behaviors, such as appropriate effort, attitude, or academic/behavioral strategies. FEMA encourages them to participate in setting goals for themselves and assist in monitoring their progress toward meeting these goals and to participate in decisions regarding classroom rules and procedures. Whenever possible, FEMA instructors should experiment with a variety of techniques to elicit input from students, and implement their suggestions whenever possible. It is also very important that students' accomplishments are acknowledged and rewarded with frequent positive feedback and praise and rewards, prizes or privileges. Despite the foregoing emphasis on empowering students' sense of efficacy in the classroom, the final responsibility for setting transactional processes in motion and projection and generation of a fundamental emotional tone rests with the teacher. In FEMA this demands far more

than the replication of such and such a series of recommended educational protocols. It requires dedication to continual self-cultivation, as discussed below.

Teacher's Self-cultivation

FEMA rejects the idea of a teacher as mere facilitator of classroom activity and likewise the expectation that the designation of the role of teacher should be sufficient alone to warrant students' attention and respect. In fact, the term 'teacher' may be inadequate to describe the multiple roles, such as manager, storyteller, singer or actress that this job so often entails. Teachers, in a sense, are the architects of society because they have the ability to shape the course of their students' futures (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). Entering into an emotional energy field as a constructive actor demands the constant development and maintenance of keen human awareness, knowledge as well as emotional strength and sensitivity. In this age of information explosion, the dynamic nature of human knowledge demands that teachers have not only a detailed understanding of the way the environment affects brain development and learning, and how to transmit knowledge, but that they continue to cultivate and maintain the life of their own learning brains (Raphael, 2017). As a result of professional realities, however, there is a danger that teachers can become detached from learning themselves, and insensitive to students' learning difficulties and individual differences in learning style. In contrast, if a teacher also remains an ardent learner, keenly interested in 'learning how to learn', she is more able to modulate her perceptual faculties in order to attune with the minds of students and sense their particular learning mode(s). Gaining the status of teacher is not a passport to exit learning. On the contrary, it is an entrance to both further learning and a license to experiment with the art of 'learning how to learn'.

Creating conditions for transformational change within a teacher is another principle that needs to be given attention (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). An effective FEMA teacher therefore straddles the personalities of both teacher and student and these dual roles enrich each other. While teaching she teaches how to learn and while learning she learns how to teach. A teacher who ceases to learn risks becoming an untapped resource since, despite her knowledge, she will lose the ability to transmit it in a dynamic way to students. Therefore, a FEMA instructor should strive to maintain an ever vibrant, growth mindset and empathetic communication style. In addition, a charismatic aura surrounds the teacher who commits herself to lifelong learning and this strongly supports her ability to influence students.

The author's work on FEMA is applied to teaching English as a foreign language, and this necessarily implies an intercultural dynamic. Living in a foreign culture, language teachers can become trapped in a self-perpetuating cultural bubble and shut off from the language and life practices of the host culture. FEMA teachers must strive to avoid this situation and aim to constantly grow in intercultural understanding. It is important for language teachers to understand the host culture's values and approach these respectfully not only within the classroom environment but within the community, too. As a specific example, in the case of Japan, students are often hesitant to participate and give their answers right away when asked. Before doing so, they first look around as if asking for approval from the body of students. This indicates the value placed on consensus by Japanese people. Being aware of these kind culturally related factors that arise in a collectivist culture that emphasizes group

values and goals helps teachers develop a sensitive and empathetic approach. Such awareness is not easily gained, but a conscious effort to cultivate it is a hallmark of the FEMA approach, aspects of which are illustrated in Figure 4, below.

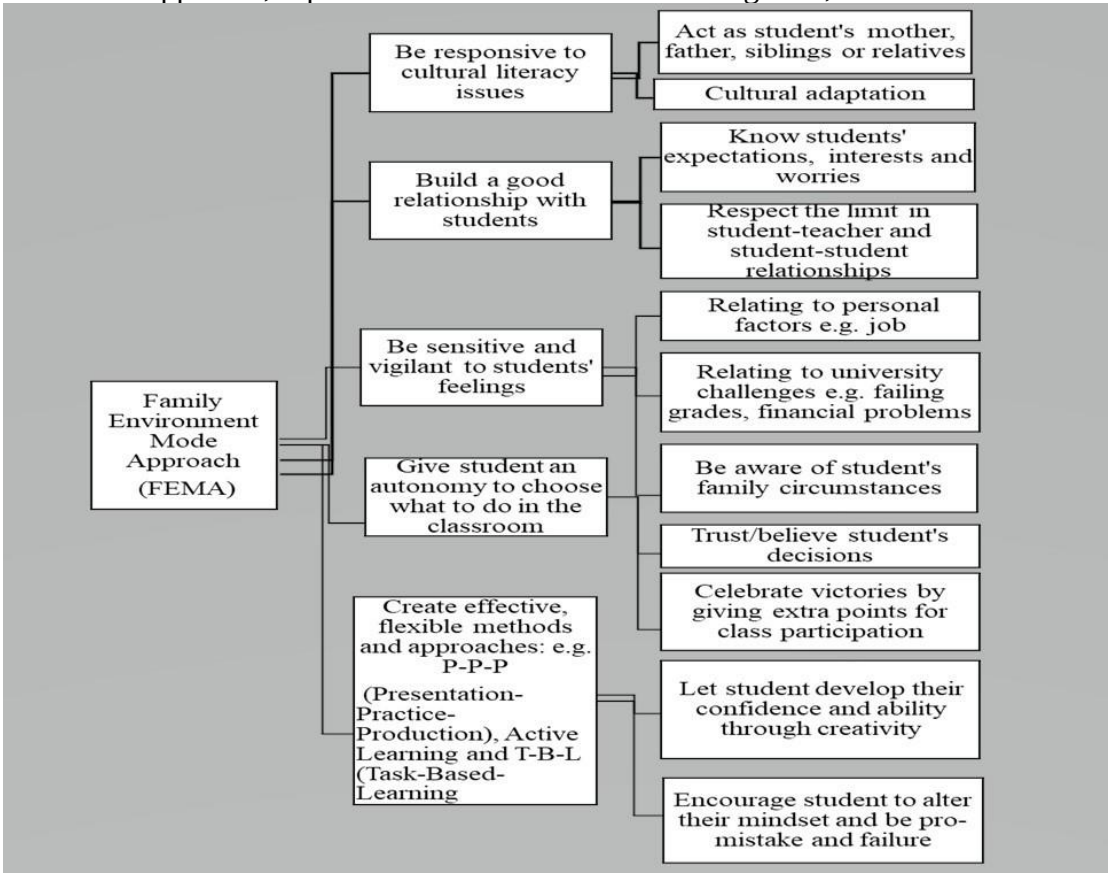

Figure 4. FEMA's intercultural and emotional awareness and sensitivity flowchart

Finally, in terms of self-cultivation, FEMA goes beyond normalizing teaching into a purely professional role. Being, and continually 'becoming' an example to others, a generative affective group actor who builds and maintains strong interpersonal relationships requires great personal emotional strength and sensitivity. To this end, obviously, FEMA instructors should strive to maintain physical health, seek out regular contact with a body of likeminded soul-searching individuals, read uplifting literature and avoid excessive alcohol consumption and other escapist behaviors. But more than this, when lived consciously and with commitment, FEMA itself can be an enriching pathway to the self-cultivation of emotional strength and sensitivity.

Conclusion

This research has shown that the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) involves the conscious application of an emotional field by self-re-generating educational actors in order to promote key concepts that indirectly affect educational outcomes by reducing stress and increasing motivation. This general approach was unpacked based on the author's experience in a Japanese context and detailed protocols for aspects of physical classroom plant, transmission of key concepts, classroom relationships and the need for continuous teacher-self cultivation were provided. In doing so, the attempt to delimit the approach led to the conclusion that the potentiality for situation specific, real time variation and change are most

significant and fundamental to FEMA on a deeper level. In particular, the vital role of the instructors in FEMA and the requirement that they develop and maintain intellectual, intercultural and emotional capabilities was revealed as being of tremendous importance. These results speak to the body of research on affect in education in general and in English language teaching and learning specifically. The protocol for the effective implementation of FEMA developed here, including a focus on its efficacy in promoting stress reduction and the role of gadgets such as *Necomimi* could be usefully developed into a FEMA textbook, both as a paper and online version. They could also be presented as a short educational DVD that demonstrates the FEMA approach for the benefit of instructors. To date, this research has looked only at FEMA's application to foreign language teaching and learning in a Japanese context. A continued, longitudinal study can offer further insights into stress and motivation as they pertain to Japanese learners and instructors active in a Japanese environment. However, by implementing the approach in various other locations with learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, helpful insights of benefit to intercultural education and current knowledge of affect in education more broadly can be gained. In particular, it would be of great interest to discover the way that the key concepts that promote the goals of FEMA vary from culture to culture. Such an investigation is part of the author's vision and plan for future work toward nurturing effective affective learning through FEMA.

Acknowledgement

The author like to express her sincere gratitude and great appreciation to Dr. Kim F. Rockell for his invaluable comments, suggestions and warm guidance in elaborating the concept of this research.

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